

SUBTERRANEAN PROSE: THE THEMATIC SIMILARITY IN THE NOVELS
OF HENRY MILLER, JACK KEROUAC, WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS,
AND KENNETH PATCHEN

An abstract of a Thesis by
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The problem. Mid-century brought the advent of a new upsurge of underground writing labeled "Subterranean" prose. The problem posed in this thesis was to define the function of Subterranean prose and, once defined, to investigate into any progressive qualities contained in the prose.

Procedure. Investigation into Subterranean prose centered around research into the historical events of the 1940's and 1950's and into the initial underground works of the more prominent Subterranean writers, Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, William S. Burroughs, and Kenneth Patchen.

Findings. The restrictive literary and cultural climate of the time encouraged a specific mode of expression and conformity. These restrictions drove many authors underground. These four authors, notably, developed alternative literary styles with which to express similar attitudes concerning man and his environment.

Conclusions. The primary function of Subterranean prose on the literary continuum was to break the boundaries of conventional prose and thereby open new avenues for experimental writing. Subterranean writers attempted to jar the literary world out of the complacency of the 1950's. The thematic structure of man in search of himself and his world was developed through a wide diversity of styles so that the content of the novels was contained in the form itself.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. A LOOK AT THE TIMES | 1 |
| 2. THE INDIVIDUAL AS SUBJECT | 13 |
| 3. STYLISTIC SIMILARITIES | 45 |
| 4. THE LAND AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THEMATIC STRUCTURE | 77 |
| 5. LITERARY AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE | 101 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 110 |

Chapter 1

A LOOK AT THE TIMES

I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless emptiness...¹

The above passage echoes the frantic search for a cultural identity that swept through the underground following the Second World War. It was from this underground that Subterranean Prose gathered its strength and momentum. During this period, America was striving towards some social stability and censorship took its toll on everything from individual behavior to fiction writing. The world was undergoing some radical changes and social reconstruction was underway. An old value system of national isolation had been blown apart; the pieces that were salvaged were being held together with string and tape. Criticism of the apparent weaknesses of the emerging cultural system was strongly discouraged and those who challenged the validity of such a system were soon considered social deviants and their mode of expression was repressed. Subterranean Prose,

¹Jack Kerouac, On the Road (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1957), p. 208.

while not representing the highest quality of American literature found in such writers as Melville, Whitman, and Twain, served a specific purpose in the continuum of American literature by revolting against the accepted structure of fiction writing and exploring new possibilities.

Subterranean writers shattered literary boundaries and thus performed a natural process of growth wherein one established boundary is broken in order to allow for the development of a richer, expanded one. The function of Subterranean Prose, then, was to open our awareness to new horizons in fiction writing, new avenues of expression. It should be viewed, therefore, as part of an on-going, evolutionary process and not as an end in itself.

The early works of Henry Miller, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Kenneth Patchen exemplify the most concrete statements of Subterranean Prose. These authors, perhaps the more popular of all Subterranean writers, broke all boundaries of literary expression of the time, wrote in completely unique, individual styles, yet carried in their writings similar themes calling for a spiritual re-awakening in a world bent on material progress. In addition, these writers were ostracised because they lived the way they wrote: wild and reckless, sometimes angelic in their behavior, more often like madmen, sometimes writing beautifully crafted passages, sometimes coming up with nonsensical drivel. They were far from living "stabilized-within-the-photo" lives.

They broke the boundaries of refined and polished prose and opened up the possibility for experimental prose. It is open to speculation as to how far their influence extended into the successive generation of writers, but I do believe they opened a door which had been kept closed for some time. The importance of Subterranean Prose may lie simply in the liberation of new ways to express the complexities of human existence in an electronic age and not in literary excellence.

Subterranean Prose was a response to the need for the time. The period from World War I to the McCarthy era saw a growth in this country toward group conformity and rigid, intolerant attitudes toward anything or anybody who held opinions contrary to those of the majority. There was a growth of inflexibility, and Subterranean writers provided a needed balancing effect by visibly swinging away from the accepted norms of society.

The First World War left people dazed and disoriented, but with the advent of World War II, there was a revealed capacity for evil in human beings. A corresponding zealous increase in patriotism and nationalism accompanied the increase of chaos and confusion as the world was plunged into conflict. With the advent of the Bomb came the realization of the possible extermination of the race of man. Man's place in the universe became less secure and the individual became a disposable entity. Shaken up as it was, America

naturally sought to establish some sense of stability. In the forties and fifties, established views began to crumble. This was a time marked by incoherence and uncertainty in which the populace began to doubt the panacea and utopia which science had offered. Twentieth Century man had become aware of the shortcomings of an overconfident reason and the "muddled inadequacy of free enterprise."² There was a growing spiritual and intellectual turmoil and man found himself sacrificing spiritual growth for material progress.

At home in America, the fear of Communism blossomed like a plague and spread to all segments of society. The social norm began to include such things as conscription and censorship. As the War abated, a new mass-consciousness spread throughout the country advertising majority rule, conformity, and strict governmental control, verging on totalitarianism. In 1949, an entire generation of liberals was put on trial with Alger Hiss and was found guilty of treason.³ The conservative forces assumed command in American life and expressed their command in the 1952 Presidential election by electing Dwight D. Eisenhower. Thus, the individual ceremoniously surrendered up his problems and turned away from a challenge of mind and will. Bruce Cook

²Chester Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.7.

³Eisinger, p. 3.

states in his book, The Beat Generation, that this was an era of:

Joe McCarthy, the HUAC hearings, and a series of spy trials that together spread a brooding pall of suspicion over all of American society. It was a time during which most of the adult population was trapped in an intricate edifice of social conformity built on fear, suppressed hostility, and the simple desire to get along. And finally, it was also a time when many adult Americans experienced personal prosperity and some degree of affluence for the first time in their lives; the middle class was expanded in that decade by many millions who could well remember extreme poverty from the depression years. Most of them had worked hard and waited a long time to get where they were. And once comfortably established, they embraced the values and symbols of middle-class⁴ life with all the fervor of religious converts.

This was no time to rock the boat. Sociologist David Riesman saw this to be a time of the "other-directed person" who took his cues from the group and responded to peer group pressure. Children were taught that self control was desirable and submission to group needs a virtue. In grade school stories such as "Tootle" were read in which Tootle, a train engine, was disciplined for straying off the track (a cardinal sin) in order to sniff the flowers. Freedom and success meant staying on the track no matter what.⁵ It is little wonder that an identity crisis was in full bloom a decade later. One of these children,

⁴Bruce Cook, The Beat Generation (New York: Scribner, 1971), p. 10.

⁵David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p.105.

poet/songwriter Bob Dylan, would grow up to complain: "I try my best to be just like I am/ but everybody wants you to be just like them."⁶

"The consequence of this repressive climate of opinion," writes Chester Eisinger, "was the virtual elimination of dissent. Extreme views, not simply with respect to the political spectrum but in any area, almost disappeared. All shades of opinion slid toward the center."⁷ As the Bomb dropped and the sky fell, the ground was cleared for the expanding new Utopia called Suburbia. And the Utopian Man became the Organization Man in the "gray flannel suit."

Miller, Kerouac, Patchen, and Burroughs were among the more prominent Subterranean writers who refused to sacrifice the individual for the sake of the group. They understood that the realization of the self, as Erich Fromm states, is "accomplished not only by an act of thinking but also by the realization of man's total personality, by the active expression of his emotional and intellectual potentialities."⁸ Going against the general trend of the country, these writers sought a self-realization and a

⁶Bob Dylan, "Maggie's Farm," from the album Bringing It All Back Home, Columbia Records, 1965.

⁷Eisinger, p. 8.

⁸Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Avon Books, 1941), p. 284.

"positive freedom" which consisted in the "spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality."⁹ Because of their attitudes, their works were banished; they were labeled as deviant; and rather than compromise their integrity, the authors went underground and became literary outlaws.

Attitudes of conformity and compliance to a status quo filtered through to the literary culture also. Two main groups of critics dominated the scene at this time: the New Critics of the colleges and universities and a group of New York intellectuals known variously as the Family and the Partisan Review crowd. The New York crowd was intensely political, having gone through a period of "keen enthusiasm for Marxism."¹⁰ The New Critics, on the other hand, were academicians who devoted their time to careful, intense readings of texts. They considered themselves to be America's saving grace and guiding light and "their poetry," according to Bruce Cook, "was crabbed, pinched, and reticent, and the fiction introspective and oblique."¹¹

These critics seemed to be more indifferent than hostile toward the works of the Subterraneans, but by

⁹Fromm, p. 284.

¹⁰Cook, p. 11.

¹¹Cook, p. 11.

controlling the literary scene, these two groups were influential in deciding who got published and who remained unknown. Eisinger saw the forties as a period void of any experimentation in prose. And in one sense, he was very correct. "Bohemianism," he writes, "from which avant-gardism springs, was in the same ill-repute as old-fashioned liberalism, and neither could withstand the challenge of respectability, which arose in reaction to them."¹² He was correct in assuming that publication of experimental prose was at a standstill. The respectable authors of the time such as Saul Bellow, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, Paul Bowles, Mary McCarthy, Robert Penn Warren, Wallace Stegner, Lionel Trilling, and others were writing acceptable, within-the-mold material.

But experimental prose was alive and active and coursing through an artistic underground which supported avant-gard literature as it supported jazz in the first revolutions of music. Henry Miller was active in Paris and Kenneth Patchen had written The Journal of Albion Moonlight after a unique fictional pattern blending prose and poetry. Ken Kesey once said of William Burroughs, "I used to say that Burroughs was the only writer that had done anything new with writing since Shakespeare. I don't say it anymore

¹²Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 17.

but I still think it's true."¹³ What kept these writers underground was the tight reign of the New Critics and the New Yorkers. Both groups were hesitant to accept anything outside the mold they had made for themselves.

The four authors, over two decades, endured a notoriety that labeled them and their works contemptible and obscene. During the late forties and early fifties, when the spark for the cultural and literary upheavals of the fifties and sixties was ignited, these authors' works were being smuggled into the hip pockets of college students who would soon swell the ranks of a counter-cultural revolution. Yet, there had been an apparent attempt to repress these early works. For example, Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer, written in 1934, was denied publication in the United States until 1961. Miller was, indeed, "a man without honor in his own country and in his own language."¹⁴ Jack Kerouac's On the Road, the first volume of his Road novels, required seven years to be published, and William Burroughs' Naked Lunch suffered through a court obscenity trial before it could legitimately enter the country. Kerouac, who suffered from being associated with the beatnik writers, fell prey

¹³Ken Kesey, "Tools from my Chest: Burroughs," The Last Supplement of the Whole Earth Catalog, March 1971, p. 74.

¹⁴Karl Shapiro, introduction to Tropic of Cancer, by Henry Miller (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. ix.

to critics who failed to consider him a serious writer.¹⁵ The exception to the rule was Kenneth Patchen who wrote in the early forties and whose works were rapidly accepted on the college campuses. However, Kenneth Patchen seems to have suffered in reverse. "He is still today," wrote Kenneth Rexroth in 1971, "an elder statesman of the youth revolt, the counter culture, and still today, he is never mentioned in the literary quarterlies."¹⁶

Experimental as their prose was, these authors were founded in a very American literary tradition. For example, the long narrative descriptions of a Thomas Wolfe and the American hobo's traditional search for freedom emanating from Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn are also found in the spontaneous prose of Jack Kerouac. Kerouac and Miller revitalized the form of autobiographical fiction. Patchen mixed surrealism with the real. And Burroughs stretched the elasticity of tradition to its limits. Traditionally, they are aligned with authors (Melville, Whitman, Twain, Wolfe) whose messages, like their own, were relatively ignored by the American literary world as well as the American public.

So these were the times of the late forties and

¹⁵Ann Charters, Kerouac (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973), p. 308.

¹⁶Kenneth Rexroth, American Poetry in the Twentieth Century (New York: The Seabury Press, 1971), p. 122.

early fifties. On the literary scene, the New Yorkers and New Critics occupied center stage and carried on their "familiar routines to the scattered applause of an indifferent audience."¹⁷ They presented to the stage a sense of intellectual elan, a sense of order and authority in the world of letters.

Then, in 1956, at the Gallery Six in San Francisco, a poetry reading commenced and there emerged on the stage "a wild, shabbily dressed, and unshaven bunch who mill in disorder about the stage, shouting obscenities, jeering, and making light of all the heavy weight of intellect assembled there. Where order was, there is now anarchy."¹⁸ The Beat Generation became visible; the subterraneans surfaced. Yet its founder, Jack Kerouac, had been struggling a decade for recognition; his novel On the Road, the key to the Beat Generation, was already ten years old. The outlaws began to unmask and stare mockingly and with disdain, indifference, and total contempt into the confused faces of the established intellectuals. They shocked and disturbed the new middle-class who could not understand their motives. They became the people that parents warned their children about.

But it was more than a revolt of ethics, more than a revolt of social etiquette. These experimental writers

¹⁷Cook, p. 12.

¹⁸Cook, p. 12.

attempted to reawaken in man a spiritual consciousness lost to the Twentieth Century. They fought for flexibility in an increasingly inflexible society. In all their works we find a continuing search for some inner realization, a spiritual search and a search destined to unite man with himself and his environment. It is an attempt at a rediscovering of roots. Kerouac, for example, was convinced that "most 'issues' were evasions of our actual human complicity and that truth lay elsewhere--down in what Yeats had called 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart'."¹⁹ To find this truth, new avenues had to be explored. To find these avenues was the function of Subterranean Prose.

These writers stood out against social complacency, conformity, and spiritual neglect in their works and by their behavior. I have concentrated primarily on their initial works--Miller's Tropics, Patchen's Journal of Albion Moonlight, Kerouac's On the Road, and Burroughs' Naked Lunch--because they were the first visible proof that literature was being written in subterranean worlds and because the authors' subsequent works developed from stylistic achievements wrought in these novels. Also, by limiting the number of works by ^{each} author, the contrast in styles should be more evident while, at the same time, the unifying thread which connects style with content should be made apparent.

¹⁹John Clellon Holmes, "Gone in October," Playboy, Feb. 1973, p. 162.

Chapter 2

THE INDIVIDUAL AS SUBJECT

"People," Henry Miller wrote in Tropic of Cancer, "are like lice--they get under your skin and bury themselves there. You scratch and scratch until the blood comes, but you can't get permanently deloused. Everywhere I go people are making a mess of their lives. Everyone has his private tragedy."¹ The above passage echoes the combined qualities of condemnation and compassion which these four writers felt toward their generations. All of them felt a need to escape from the masses which plagued them and restricted their growth both professionally as writers and personally as individuals, yet none of them could completely dissociate themselves from the common humanity. Always, throughout their works, there was an attempt to incorporate their sense of freedom into the masses' urgency for security.

In this fashion, attempting to alleviate what philosophers call the Human Condition and what Jack Kerouac considered to be the motto of his family ("How we continue in this endless Gloom I'll never know--Love, Suffer, and

¹Henry Miller, Tropic of Cancer (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 11. Subsequent parenthetical page references will refer to this edition of Tropic of Cancer. Cancer will be used as an abbreviated title.

Work is the motto of my family."²) these writers performed a function which literature has performed through the ages, from the Vedic texts, the oldest recorded literature, to the present fiction of contemporary authors such as Ken Kesey and Thomas Pynchon; that is, they explained the necessity for individuals to explore inner needs, to develop creativity and expand awareness, to raise their level of consciousness in order to appreciate and understand their existence. They did this not only through the content of their writings but also through their specific styles.

The message through the ages remains basically the same. In his introduction to Naked Lunch, William Burroughs gave a word to the wise, "Look down LOOK DOWN along that junk road before you travel there..."³ Roads change but the message is clear: the wise inquire about the path to make sure that it leads them towards a Golden Fleece and not simply to some lamb's wool. The hero has an idea of the reward before he undertakes the journey. What differs is each author's approach to the message--how he saw and experienced the world to begin with and how he saw his generation's association with the world he described. It was their approach which distinguished these four authors

²Jack Kerouac, Desolation Angels (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1960), p. 371.

³William S. Burroughs, Naked Lunch (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. xlviii. Subsequent parenthetical page references will refer to this edition of Naked Lunch.

from the other writers of their time. Henry Miller saw the world as a cancer growing out of control and eating itself to death. Kenneth Patchen was embittered by the World Wars and saw man as acting in a manner which was repugnant to the dignity of the human spirit, but he still believed that man had the capabilities to rise to loftier worlds. William Burroughs ran the gamut of obscene gestures in describing the chaos and mental torment which goes to create the universe and which individuals must overcome. And Jack Kerouac saw his America falling into the apathy of Suburbia, developing a blind neuroticism and calling it security.

In Mid-Twentieth Century, these writers saw the true beauty of the human soul being hidden or buried beneath a mounting wave of consumerism and group apathy. They were concerned at this time with the transition from a more spiritual concern for personal growth to a more material, object-oriented society. They were concerned that with the increase of group conformity, an individual might lose his own identity (which he has) and feel satisfied with using only a small percentage of his mental and physical potential (which he is). On the other hand, the road they traveled hopefully led to a goal of happiness, freedom, and self-liberation.

These writers were captivated by the notion of coming to grips with some higher reason for existence and some understanding of the pervasive orderliness amidst the

chaos. For example, Burroughs sought to understand the working of systems, biological and political, and Kerouac strove to understand the connecting thread of Time. They were able, in a pretentious but often humorous manner, to scold the race of man for stagnating the evolution of the human soul, for negating the expression of the human will, and for accepting as proper a life full of suffering. They were seekers after the Truth and sought for Truth through personal experiences of self-discovery.

Henry Miller was the first of these four writers to observe the growing insecurity and isolation of the individual passing from the Industrial Age to the Age of Technology. He was the first of the four to witness the growth of a strong national pride as individuals drew their security from group support, having already begun to feel insignificant, powerless, and alone at the hands of gigantic forces beyond their personal control.⁴ He was also the first of the four to recognize that real freedom came from within the individual, from a profound sense of self realization, and not from some legislature. His Tropics define freedom as acting without limitations, mentally or physically, realizing the unbounded extent of one's potentialities, acting as an independent, yet inseparable Being. A person could not be told he was free; he must know he is free.

⁴Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 144.

In Miller's Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn, written in the 1930's and subsequently banned in the United States, the search took on an almost obscene, chaotic, urgent rush through the jungles of humanity, teeming with every sort of incest between the flesh and the soul. Miller, the narrator in both Tropics, trapped as he was in the rank fecundity of a world steaming in its own back-alley ejaculations (a description, by the way, that can also be applied to Burroughs' images), was yet enraptured at the mystery of individual existence. Broken down, poor, unknown in Paris, he was still "...the happiest man alive." Although written in the 30's, the Tropics eschewed the frantic pace of civilization which was as much a reality then as now, and Miller thought that in the hierarchy of needs, Time deserved top billing over such necessities as food, clothing, shelter. One needed time to discover himself before all other necessities became meaningful. From page to page, from one absurd adventure to the next, he continued to strip away all illusions in order to get at some bare, naked truth of raw existence.

At a time when America had conquered its physical frontiers, at a time when America's military might had shown its prominence in the world power, at a time when one should be "proud to be an American," Henry Miller savagely ripped away the blindfold to reveal the absurdity of nationalism, economic concerns, and Great Gatsby affluence. While working

in New York, Miller gave this impression of the state of the Union and the condition of the world:

I sat riveted to my desk and I traveled around the world at lightning speed, and I learned that everywhere it is the same--hunger, humiliation, ignorance, vice, greed, extortion, chicanery, torture, despotism: the inhumanity of man to man: the fetters, the harness, the halter, the bridle, the whip, the spurs. The finer the caliber the worse off the man....When I think of some of the Persians, the Hindus, the Arabs I knew, when I think of the character they revealed, their grace, their tenderness, their intelligence, their holiness, I spit on the white conquerors of the world, the degenerate British, the pigheaded Germans, the smug, self-satisfied French. The earth is one great sentient being, a planet saturated through and through with man,...it is not the home of the white race or the black race or the yellow race or the lost blue race, but the home of man and all men are equal before God and will have their chance...⁵

It is little wonder that America chose to ignore him. Miller glorified man's individual Self; America glorified man's pledge of allegiance to the masses. Miller saw in man the ability to rise above his suffering. Norman Mailer, writing in the American Review, puts this idea in perspective as he explains, "Down in the sewers of existence where the cancer was being cooked, Miller was cavorting. Look, he was forever saying, you do not have to die of this crud. You can breathe it, eat it, suck it, fuck it, and still bounce up for the next day. There is something inestimable in us if

⁵Henry Miller, Tropic of Capricorn (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp. 32-33. Subsequent parenthetical page references will refer to this edition of Tropic of Capricorn. Capricorn will be used as an abbreviated title.

we can stand the smell."⁶

Tropic of Capricorn and Tropic of Cancer are adventure books with their setting in the sewers of existence. However, the adventure takes a dramatic turn from the typical adventure book. The novels were banned because of the street language and the ribald romps between the sexes, but observed closely, the direction of the action turns from the physical world and dives within the individual, going beyond or transcending the physical, outward, environment which captivates the senses and disallows the experience of some inner reality. "For there is only one great adventure," Miller wrote, "and that is inward toward the self, and for that, time nor space nor even deeds matter" (Capricorn, p. 12). There is an underlying thread to the Tropics which connects not only man to his environment but man to his Self, to the subtle regions within the more gross developments of physical form. Trying to find the end of the connecting thread, trying to find some meaning for existence, Henry Miller confessed: "I reached out for something to attach myself to--and I found nothing. But in reaching out, in the effort to grasp, to attach myself, left high and dry as I was, I nevertheless found something I had not looked for--myself" (Capricorn, p. 13).

⁶Norman Mailer, "Henry Miller: Genius and Lust, Narcissism," American Review 24, ed. Theodore Solotaroff (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 6.

Regardless of his rejection of humanity as a whole, Miller had a profound belief in the potentiality of the individual. What Miller continually detests in the Tropics is the "Ordinary human suffering, ordinary human jealousy, ordinary human ambitions..." (Capricorn, p. 209). Miller believed it was in the capacity of an individual to rise to a state where he was using "full consciousness," and he considered this to be the grand challenge. All experiences in the Tropics have that one aim at their root; all experiences must be taken together in order to make a complete whole. Miller believed that each individual was responsible for working out his own destiny and the only help he could receive would be if every other individual recognized each man's right to this working out of destiny and responded by being kind, generous and patient. The Tropics ring with an enthusiastic zeal for man and his ability to enjoy life and to understand the Self. "The most wonderful opportunity which life offers," Henry Miller wrote in Tropic of Capricorn, "is to be human. It embraces the whole universe" (Capricorn, p. 229). Miller's glorification and praise of Man parallels Hamlet's famous Apostrophe from Act II, scene ii, of Hamlet:

What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason,
how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how
express and admirable, in action how like an angel,
in apprehension how like a god:...

Although he, like Hamlet, had little to do with the idiotic scurrings of his fellow man, Miller exclaimed in Tropic of

Capricorn "Who has the last say? Man! The earth is his because he is the earth, its fire, its water, its air, its mineral and vegetable matter, its spirit which is cosmic, which is imperishable, which is the spirit of all the planets, which transforms itself through him, through endless signs and symbols, through endless manifestations" (Capricorn, p. 33). In the next generation, such ecstasies would be heard in the writings of Jack Kerouac who also felt the connectedness of all things, the one cosmic soul or spirit flowing through the universe.

Sifting through the complex narratives of Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn, one finds professed both a duality and a unity between man and his society. Certainly a man is influenced by his society and his behavior helps, in turn, to structure his environment, but Miller believed that a man must be isolated or detached from his society in order to discover his true nature. This is a familiar theme in most Eastern philosophies. For example, the Bhagavad-Gita talks of a Self-liberated man as operating in a manner of detached-attachment and of liberating the Self by transcending the manifest world and arriving at the unmanifest Absolute, a state of Pure Consciousness or Pure Existence. Adapting this idea, Miller understood the need for man to contact his Inner Being, that Absolute, and for this he had to detach himself from society. It is a solitary journey and history records only a few individuals who have

successfully make the trip. However, Miller recognized the existence of such individuals and considered them to be quite remarkable. In the introduction to Tropic of Cancer he describes such people:

At no time in the history of man has the world been so full of pain and anguish. Here and there, however, we meet with individuals who are untouched, unsullied, by the common grief. They are not heartless individuals, far from it! They are emancipated beings. For them the world is not what it seems to us. They see with other eyes. We say of them that they have died to the world. They live in the moment, fully, and the radiance which emanates from them is a perpetual song of joy. (Cancer, p. xxvii).

This concept of "other realities" blossoms from time to time throughout the history of literature. We see it in Shakespeare's tragedies, in William Blake's visions, and, more recently, in the writings of America's great poet, Walt Whitman. But it has been in the Twentieth Century that this idea of a more profound Reality beyond the surface level of existence has gathered such a large following.

It is interesting to note that intriguing discoveries in the field of quantum mechanics are now putting concrete proof to the experience which artists and writers have been having down through the ages. For example, the quantum field state is a state of expanded boundaries, absolute harmony with the laws of nature, friction-free flow, where virtual particles exist in unmanifest form and give rise to all manifest creation. In one sense, the quantum state contains all the impulses of life. It is this

world of infinite peace and harmony which wise men of every culture appear to have glimpsed from time to time. Theodore Roszak, in his The Making of a Counter Culture, describes such seers as "shamans," although each culture has a different name for these wise men. "The Shaman," he explains, "is one who knows that there is more to be seen of reality than the waking eye sees. Besides our eyes of flesh, there are eyes of fire that burn through the ordinariness of the world and perceive the wonders and terrors beyond. In the superconsciousness of the shaman, nothing is simply a dead object..."⁷ Henry Miller, ancestor of the 60's counter culture, knew there was a greater reality, free from the troubles which plague us, and knew this reality was obtainable. The narrator of the Tropics discovers a wonderful peace at last as he sits by the river Seine in the setting sun and feels the flow of the river, like the flow of life from the beginning of time, with all "--its past, its ancient, soil, the changing climate. The hills gently girdle it about: its course is fixed" (Cancer, p. 287). Life continues, we hear Miller saying, unhindered by space or time, and the individual has the choice to either flow with the current or struggle upstream.

Henry Miller, more so than the other writers, found it possible to divorce himself, in the form of the narrator,

⁷Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 248.

from his fellow men and take that adventure toward the Soul, or Self. The other three authors, dealing with similar themes of Self discovery, were troubled over how a man was to function in a world gone mad. Miller was able to isolate himself from his friends and society and keep a conscious recognition of this isolation. Events, therefore, only passed by and failed to leave any obvious mark or impression. Miller observed the masses from a distance ("Human beings make a strange fauna and flora" [Cancer, p. 287] he casually remarks), and there was none of the agonizing compassion and sentimentality one feels in the works of Kenneth Patchen and Jack Kerouac. Patchen, in his The Journal of Albion Moonlight, appeared to be sensitive to the activities going on around him and could not successfully isolate himself from the effects of these actions. "All men are brothers" was his credo and no brother should take arms against another. Patchen was deeply concerned with how man was handling his opportunity to attain to God, or some spiritual paradise symbolized by Goshen, the promised land, the city at the end of the journey.

The Journal of Albion Moonlight, one of three novels by Patchen, was published in 1941. In 1941 America was getting its feet wet in World War II and it looked to be a long swim. There was a rousing call for patriotism. In Hollywood, actors such as Gary Cooper and Glenn Ford would star in movies calling for the destruction of the German and

Japanese peoples. In fox holes, American G.I.'s praised the Lord and passed the ammunition. Kenneth Patchen wrote The Journal as a cry in the wilderness for love and peace and as a scathing rebuke of man's inhumanity to man. The Journal speaks of a three-pronged relationship between man and man, man and his inner Being, and man and God. Like Miller's Tropics and William Burroughs' Naked Lunch, it is a difficult novel to decipher, but it is safe to say that the work deals with the corporate madness of War and Love and sex and hate and murder and death and birth and mutilations of the body and soul and the beauty which lies in the Eye of the beholder and bombings of innocent bystanders blown to bits. In other words, in a war-time society, it is a timeless piece of work. The scenes jump from image to image, like shell fragments exploding chaotically away from center, and like Naked Lunch, it reads more like a documentary film than a novel.

The main character, Albion Moonlight, speaks to us directly of Patchen's concern for man's spiritual quest. "Albion" is an adaptation of William Blake's "Eternal Man" and in The Journal, Albion is on a journey to recover his divine inheritance, an inheritance within each man. Patchen explained, through Albion, that he had, "brought into being people of my own size." All the characters represent some common characteristic or emotion which, taken as a whole, are Patchen's interpretations of the vices and

virtues operating within the individual. We observe the careless murderer, the betrayer, the man of great spiritual strength, the common woman/man, the desirable woman/man, and the man of devout purity. They also indicate, by having communal characteristics seen in all men, the binding force of humanity from which one cannot escape.

Patchen presented Albion as the expression of the Collective Man whose activities influence all men and who must take responsibility for the society which is produced. Through the wild, often surrealistic travels of the strange companions in the novel, Patchen develops his question of man's struggle to find some inner identity and peace amid a world filled with chaos and insanity. Patchen was outraged at a society where guns and bombs and the production of weapons meant more than the individual--where poetry and art were entombed while aggression, political dishonesty, and violence were allowed to grow and prosper at the expense of human life. His cry of defiance could be heard on college campuses throughout the country. He disavowed a technocracy which, as Theodore Roszak states, "rejects spontaneity, self-regulation, animal impulsiveness as if they were so much poison in the body politic, preferring instead goals and behavior that can be expressed in vast, abstract magnitudes: national power (measured in units of overkill), high productivity and efficient mass marketing (measured as the GNP), the space race, the elaboration of administrative systems,

etc."⁸ Albion, comprehending the situation for the first time, comments on his society as follows:

I burst into laughter. For the first time, with the opening of the door, in the hot flood of light, with somewhere away in that world we had left, people moving in and out of dancehalls, pumping water at lonely wells, as we stood there, the whole big damn thing taking place, wind tugging at prowling cats, swelling girls pulling on college sweaters, canoes nosing through moonlight and condoms, boxers sitting hunched like slim assassins on their stools in the cardboard light, small boys masturbating each other in the exclusive schools of the rich, the brain boys with poems like iron turds in lavender water measuring off their reputations in apothecaries' scales, drummers in Chattanooga bunning-up on Coca-Cola, bedroom smelling of Oedipus and lysol, Filipinos with larded hair ordering more shoulder-padding and trying to waddle like Dempsey, organs sneezing 'O promise me' and the boogie woogies making blue hot love to the angel of Bix Beiderbecke, while we stood there beside the dying cop, I say, in this world of arrogant murder and shameless falsehood, with our own Rome falling around our ears, with not one single, blazing, wonderful star that hasn't been pissed on by some butcher bleating of his destiny, yes, yes, men in ditches filled with the guts of their fellows, the ghosts of all the wars trying to scream above the jackal mouthings of the war-mongers, and I was laughin', kids being blown to hell like bags full of sheepshit, the same ones all the shouting and poems and music and statues are about, the same warm good kids with their clean, fearless eyes looking at you, standing there in that room with all the bucket-thumping paraphernalia of a forty-hand novelist's technique keeping me from what I wanted to say--⁹

Albion Moonlight sees only a shadow of life on earth. All seemed dead or dying, moving in a half-light. Throughout

⁸Roszak, p. 198.

⁹Kenneth Patchen, The Journal of Albion Moonlight (New York: New Directions, 1941), pp. 66-67. Subsequent parenthetical page references will refer to this edition of The Journal.

the novel there are ethereal images of natural beauty, even celestial beauty, intermixed with the horror of a cancerous, industrialized growth. The enemies of man, symbolized by the dogs of evil who continually stalk the company and whose eyes are seen always in the darkness on the outer rim of campfire light, lead one to believe, through inductive reasoning, that Patchen still saw some obtainable heaven in the wings. There was a goodness in man which Evil sought desperately to devour. Albion realizes that "Christ...arose from the dead." And the dead were the men of this earth who dealt in death and those who cooperated in the crucifixion of all that was right and good. Beyond the dead was a beauty which could not be completely destroyed, a beauty which could be restored.

Patchen portrayed man as a crude form of technocratic primitive, an expert at exploitation and destruction, an unpopular view in light of the growing emphasis on industrial and technological expansion. Miller seemed to hold complementary opinions of man's importance. In Tropic of Capricorn, for example, Miller describes the human race as flies on a dung hill. All the flies buzz about in complete confusion yet seem to operate under some false assumption that their localized activity has some bearing on the workings of the universe. Miller relegated the affairs of daily life to a secondary importance. It mattered little what a man did, or did not do; what mattered was how he did or did

not do it. Miller proposed that a man should strive to rise above the petty, mundane affairs of existence and routine work by living creatively in the light of full consciousness. A man should first be, then do.

As with Miller, Patchen dealt a heavy blow to the opinion that civilization rests on the creation and utilization of gadgets and machines and that the accumulation of goods is the mark of success. For Albion and Company, civilization is measured by the amount of cooperation and good-will one man shows another. "Our message was this:" Albion explains, "we live, we love you. Our religion was life. Flowers, brooks, trees..." (p. 17). However, Albion and his friends are rebuked and left to starve along the way.

Although man has the ability to deface the earth and to act hostile to his fellows, the beauty of nature remains as an independent entity in The Journal. The world appears to remain the same, only the characters' perceptions of the world changes. Throughout the novel, scenes of gentle, delicate beauty that soften the imagination are juxtaposed amid the violent scenes of murder and mayhem.

Following in the Socratic tradition of "Know Thyself," these four authors attempted to discover some reality other than the outer physical aspect of life. They differ only in their method of discovery. Some of this difference is found in their respective styles and will be explained in

the next chapter. But even these differences stem from a basic degree of unity. For the most part, their method of approach determined the form the writing took. For example, Miller embraced the dregs of society and found saints in the sewers. In The Journal of Albion Moonlight Patchen took Albion and Company through the thick sediment of the terrestrial in order to reach the beauty of the celestial (arising from the dead). All four writers set their heroes outside the walls of literary tradition and tried to provide a unique style with which their hero could survive. Kerouac, along with Miller, spoke in terms of concrete experiences which, if not always credible, could be followed step-by-step as the message unfolded, but Patchen and Burroughs, in describing the quest, wrote in more metaphysical, abstract terms and symbols.

The journey which Albion undertook was a mental quest beyond the physical, into the sub-conscious, where things may or may not be what they appear to be, where reality is perceived according to one's level of consciousness. The novel is alive with a mental torment which is lifted to great heights when witnessing the beauty and good in man and tumbled to the depths of depression by visions of war and madness with no end in sight. Mental ecstasies follow all four writers through their work from Henry Miller waking with the simple idea of "Do anything, but let it yield ecstasy." and building on this idea until he is at a climax

declaring, "I love everything that flows, everything that has time in it and becoming, that brings us back to the beginning where there is never end:..." (Cancer, pp. 229-232) to Jack Kerouac's vision on Market Street that builds to the instant he describes: "...I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the blackness of the mortal realm,..."¹⁰

Kenneth Patchen considered the world to be illusory, made of dreams. The only realities were the realities within the mind. "The mind," says Albion, "can take flight into the world, because it is not purely of the world; the spirit cannot escape, because it is the world--it is, in fact, the only world which the mind can know" (p. 205). Man can constantly change realities simply by altering his perception or awareness yet there is one Reality which does not change, which connects all things, and it is with this Reality that the mind seeks to unite.

However, the world's reality at the time when Miller, Patchen, Kerouac, and Burroughs were writing was one of chaos and disorder. There seemed to be little visible proof of the basic law of nature which states, "Everything is connected to everything else." With the advent of atomic warfare and the potential for total annihilation, the world

¹⁰ Jack Kerouac, On the Road (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1957), p. 143.

became held in a state of suspension. Yet even as the major world powers prepared to destroy each other in what became the nuclear arms race, a thread of hope wove through the novels and tied these four writers together. In The Journal Patchen prophesies, "I believe that the revolutions of the future will be concerned with altering the minds of men, with vomiting out all that is insane for his animal." Metaphysically speaking, Patchen suggests the Eastern philosophical idea of the existence of some infinite, absolute silence permeating everywhere and everything. "There is no darkness anywhere." Albion Moonlight explains, "There are only sick little men who have turned away from the light" (p.313).

These sick little men became the prime movers of William Burroughs' famous novel, Naked Lunch. In Naked Lunch Burroughs presented different factions of society which tried to gain power and control over an individual's behavior, and once in control, these factions--which were also controlled by the individual's need for their control--slyly administered to the addiction to keep the individual unknowingly addicted, or indifferent to the addiction. Each page of Naked Lunch is an agonized scream against such control, be it the product of narcotics, political systems, or science and technology which mechanized the individual and turned him into a predictable machine. Again, there is the cry for flexibility and adaptability so that a system does

not degenerate into a static state.

It was this element of control which captivated Burroughs. He not only vividly illustrated how the nervous system reacted once controlled by narcotics or "junk," but under that surface level of meaning, he also pointedly described a society where politics, science, and bigotry were the controlling factors in an individual's behavior. As Norman Mailer stated in "Excerpts from the Boston Trial of Naked Lunch," "Nowhere, as in Naked Lunch's collection of monsters, half-mad geniuses, cripples, mountebanks, criminals, perverts, and putrefying beasts is there such a modern panoply of the vanities of the human will, of the excesses of evil which occur when the idea of personal or intellectual power reigns superior to the compassions of the flesh" (p. xviii). Burroughs, through his unique style and power of the word, attempted to break the individual away from all control so that he could act from a level of spontaneity and integrity. Allen Ginsberg's interpretation of the title has it relating to the "...nakedness of seeing, to being able to see clearly without any confusing disguises, to see through the disguise" (p. xxii).

But it is no easy task, Burroughs tells us, to break a habit. Every aspect of the system rebels. A junkie experiences what is called "the sickness" when he tries to kick a habit and a little bit of his insides die. Societies are torn apart when they lose some of their habits of control or

accepted norms. For example, the old habits of race relations were broken during the last decade and the breaking caused the outbreak of civil war in the major urban areas throughout this country. Burroughs dealt not only with the individual but with the planet as a whole and declared that individuals must break away from controlling power groups and act from their own level of potentiality, establishing a society based on cooperation rather than control, on integration rather than segregation, if this planet is expected to survive. If the habit cannot be broken, Burroughs describes what will happen:

Power groups of the world frantically cut lines of connection...

The Planet drifts to random insect doom...

Thermodynamics has won at a crawl...Orgone balked at the post...Christ bled...Time ran out...(p. 224)

The lines of connection do not simply refer to the interconnected matrix of the nervous system but to all communication lines in any system from relationships between two people to whole political systems.

Mary McCarthy uses the analogy of a circus to describe Burroughs' approach to life. "A circus travels," she says, "but it is always the same, and this is Burroughs' sardonic image of modern life. The Barnum of the show is the mass-manipulator, who appears in a series of disguises. Control, as Burroughs says, underlining it, can never be a means to anything but more control--like drugs, and the vicious circle of addiction is re-enacted, worldwide, with sideshows in the

political and 'social' sphere--"¹¹ For example, one of the main characters in the novel (if one can pick main characters in Naked Lunch) is a Dr. Benway, advisor to the Free-land Republic, a place given over to "free love and continual bathing" where the citizens appear to be well adjusted and cooperative, but under the surface it is evident that "Benway is a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing, and control" (p. 21). The only way to be free of control, Burroughs seems to be saying, is to be in command of one's own faculties, to be in control of the Self, free from the boundaries of society and impositions of political systems.

Politically, there are four major parties in the Interzone, the imaginary world of Naked Lunch, and each party has its own theory of control. On one extreme there are the Liquefactionists. Liquefactionists are intent upon merging everyone into "One Man" by a "process of protoplasm absorption." Their aim is to place control in the hands of one man and to liquidate all opposition. They are comparable to the racists and bigots of today's society who would place their man, their prototype, in power and follow him blindly. Burroughs defines the Liquefaction Party as a party

¹¹Mary McCarthy, "Burroughs' Naked Lunch," The Writings on the Wall, and other Literary Essays, by Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1970), p. 46.

composed of dupes except for one, unknown man who is ruler of all other dupes.

The moderates make up the Divisionists who "cut off tiny bits of their flesh and grow exact replicas of themselves in embryo jelly" (p. 164). In this way, control is secured. One cannot help but find a resemblance to this behavior in the tract houses of early middle-class suburbia. The replicas never become independent, having to periodically recharge with the "Mother Cell." The breakdown in the Party begins when undesirables are eliminated, and, of course, every replica that is not one's own becomes undesirable. Bans on identical replicas are established and whole communities are exterminated. In order to avoid termination of their replicas, the citizens begin to "dye, distort, and alter them with face and body molds." Divisionists are hysterically paranoid and become latent or overt homosexuals. Burroughs' satirical humor is craftily exhibited in defining some activities of Divisionists: "Evil old queens tell the young boys: 'If you go with a woman your replicas won't grow,'... (the authorities) stage pre-election raids and destroy vast replica cultures in the mountainous regions of the Zone where replica moonshiners hole up,... Sex with a replica is strictly forbidden and almost universally practiced..." (p. 166). Living in fear, the Divisionists have a difficult time obtaining the societal control they seek ideologically.

Somewhere between the Liquefactionists and the Divisionists are The Senders. Senders work by telepathic communication and are the most dangerous of the parties, mainly because they do not know what they are doing. A telepathic sender controls all physical movements, mental processes, emotional reactions, and sensory impressions of the workers. By definition, they must always be sending their bioelectrical signals because to receive means that someone else is having feelings of his own and the continuity is destroyed. There can be only one Sender, therefore, at one place in time and eventually he has exhausted all feelings and turns into a "huge centipede" which the workers then burn and elect a new Sender by "consensus of the general will." The goal of the senders is to have one Sender rule the planet and so Burroughs emphatically states, "You see control can never be a means to any practical end...It can never be a means to anything but more control...Like junk..." (p. 164). Burroughs claims that, "only a few Senders know what they are doing and these top Senders are the most dangerous and evil men in the world..." (p. 162).

It is The Senders whom the Factualists most abhor although they are also anti-Liquefactionist and anti-Divisionist. The Factualists oppose replicas because they tend to circumvent progress and change, they oppose the Liquefactionists' protoplasmic core in order to maintain a "maximum of flexibility," and, most of all, they oppose the use of

telepathic knowledge to "control, coerce, debase, exploit or annihilate the individuality of another living creature" (p. 167). They consider The Sender to be the antithesis of the human individual, that is, the Human Virus. Similar to an earlier analogy defining bureaus as cancerous, parasitic organisms, The Sender, as virus, becomes a deteriorated cell "leading a parasitic existence." Factualists are on the farthest extreme from the Liquefactionists. They are against state control and for whatever is natural and does no harm. Burroughs, on one hand, admits to being a Factualist, but he is also heard to say that "the parties are not in practice separate but blend in all combinations" (p. 167). There are no independents left in the Interzone; all portray a mixture of the parties' characteristics and the reader is invariably drawn to make comparisons with contemporary ideology.

One of the most intriguing features of the works of these writers, as with all commendable authors, is the possibility of analysis on several different levels. Naked Lunch, on the one hand, is a detailed description of the mental and physical torment of drug addiction and drug withdrawal. It can also be expanded to incorporate the bureaucratic control which filters down through our society. Condensed, the thrust of Naked Lunch applies to the individual and to the importance of surpassing boundaries and becoming free, independent of outside influences and stimuli, be they

societal mores or chemicals. Theodore Solotaroff, in his The Red Hot Vacuum and Other Pieces of the Writing of the Sixties, claims that "The basis of Burroughs' fiction from Naked Lunch forward has been his depiction of the endemic lusts of body and mind which prey on men, hook them, and turn them into beasts: the pushers as well as the pushed."¹² Both Miller and Burroughs, along with such social theorists as Erich Fromm, Jules Henry, Paul Goodman, and Theodore Roszak, have seen what could happen to the individual in a growing technocratic society where objects are mass produced according to their use value and individual emotions are likewise tuned to a fever pitch to become insatiable appetites. In a fast-paced technology where desires demand instantaneous gratification, love is abandoned for the more immediate satisfaction of lustful pursuits.

In his writing Burroughs has one purpose: to jolt the individual out of his complacency and free him from inhibiting control. He demands that the individual acquire a firm grasp on his Self-identity. The alternative is to spend eternity in the bowels of hell performing some Sisyphean ritual of perverted acts with cripples and mental degenerates. In other words, to spend eternity here on earth. Burroughs would, as Jerry Bryant states, "...liberate

¹²Theodore Solotaroff, "William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need," The Red Hot Vacuum and Other Pieces of the Writing of the Sixties (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 247.

human spontaneity, which stimulates growth and constitutes identity..."¹³ It is this concern for the individual and his identity which explodes in fragmented images throughout Naked Lunch.

Burroughs explains in his introduction to Naked Lunch that it was Jack Kerouac who suggested the title and that it means, "exactly what the words say: NAKED Lunch--a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork." No disguises, no excuses, no cosmetics to hide the truth. And it was Jack Kerouac, probably better than any other Subterranean writer of this time period, who captured the meaninglessness and boredom which were deadening the human nerve centers of the country. Kerouac was hard pressed to find an explanation for the apathy and blasé attitude which was spreading like a cancer through the hearts and minds of the American people. Sal Paradise, Kerouac's counterpart in On the Road, declares that the only people for him are "the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing,..."¹⁴ His search took on a frantic disposition and, symbolically, his Road novels can be seen as a search for some inner awareness, some spiritual truth, an approach

¹³Jerry Bryant, The Open Decision (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 203.

¹⁴Kerouac, On the Road, p. 9.

to God.¹⁵ Like Burroughs, Kerouac felt held back by the society of the time which attempted to stagnate the individual's progress toward some heavenly goal and negate a writer's attention to combining content and form. And yet, at the same time, Sal seems trapped by the material world from which he longs to escape. In the midst of a frantic, whirlwind visit to Dean Moriarty, for example, Sal envisions a day when they will embrace the middle-class and "be able to live on the same street with our families and get to be a couple of oldtimers together."¹⁶

Perhaps it was the failure to reconcile this apparent contradiction in life styles that led Kerouac to consider himself to be "passing through" the world. Like Miller, he was disassociated from the world as if he were watching a parade pass by. The vision of the freedom of eternity which he saw while employed as a fire lookout atop Mt. Hozomeen in the Pacific Northwest had "little use in cities and warring societies such as we have--What a world is this, not only that friendship cancels enmity, but enmity doth cancel friendship and the grave and the urn cancel all--Time enough to die in ignorance, but now that we live what shall we celebrate, what shall we say?"¹⁷

¹⁵ Frederick Feied, No Pie in the Sky: The Hobo as American Culture Hero (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), p. 57.

¹⁶ Kerouac, On the Road, p. 207.

¹⁷ Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p. 85.

Common to these four writers was the belief that within each individual, lying dormant and waiting to sprout, was a seed of wisdom. In order to make this seed grow, one needed to redirect the perceptions from the usual outward projection to some inward transcendence. The outer world could neither add any nourishment nor aid in the search. The only way individuals could help each other was by being kind, and the only way a man could help himself was to "hurt no one, mind your own business, and make our compact with God."¹⁸ Jack Duluoz's advice to "Avoid the world, it's just a lot of dust and drag and means nothing in the end," which is heard in the opening remarks of Part Three of Desolation Angels, illustrates Kerouac's belief that any substantial meaning of life must emerge from within the individual.

Unfortunately, Kerouac was labeled as "king of the Beats" and was not taken seriously as a writer.¹⁹ To the critics he was a "beatnik" writer and was deluged with inquiries as to the meaning of "Beat." His writing was regarded as nothing more than the legend of Beat life. A generation sprung up around his experiences in On the Road; however, Kerouac considered himself to be "a storyteller in the French tradition, not a spokesman for the masses."²⁰

¹⁸Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p. 348.

¹⁹Charters, Kerouac, p. 308.

²⁰Charters, Kerouac, p. 344.

While Burroughs and Patchen are closely aligned in their style of surrealistic images and clearly crafted pictures of fantasy, Kerouac closely aligns with Miller in his descriptions of society and the search for freedom. Both writers dealt with personal introspection thinly veiled through a narrator. Both are characterized by outbursts of spontaneous ejaculations--spontaneity being the key to capture the finer essence or impulse of the creative act. But unlike Miller's Tropics, novels like On the Road and The Dharma Bums can be traced back to a very American tradition. Direct parallels may be drawn between On the Road and Huckleberry Finn in which Mark Twain develops this flight to find freedom in America and within oneself. Aaron Latham, in an article for The New York Times Book Review in 1973, stated that "Jack Kerouac's On the Road was the Huckleberry Finn of the mid-20th Century. Kerouac substituted the road for the river, the fast car for the slow raft, the hipster in search of freedom for the black slave in search of freedom..."²¹ Latham continues to suggest that Kerouac, like Twain before him, discovered the American heartland as a subject and setting for American writers, and in the discovery of a place came the rediscovery of a voice. The characters of On the Road tell their story in their own words. Latham goes so far as to state that Kerouac

²¹Aaron Latham, "Visions of Cody," The New York Times Book Review, 28 Jan. 1973, p. 42.

rediscovered the vernacular at a time "when an effete literary language once again threatened to silence all other voices."²²

The rediscovery of a subject and a voice to define the subject was all part of a common theme which united the works of these Subterranean writers. All four authors searched for some genuine ideals they hoped would uplift society and add some liveliness and creativity to the lives of their fellow men. However, the difference between genuine and fictional ideals must be recognized. "All genuine ideals have one thing in common:" Erich Fromm says, "they express the desire for something which is not yet accomplished but which is desirable for the purposes of the growth and happiness of the individual."²³ These writers attempted to discover some untapped inner potential and truth and this attempt is even more evident in their respective styles which integrate the flexibility of experience with the flexibility of form.

²²Latham, p. 43.

²³Fromm, p. 292.

Chapter 3

STYLISTIC SIMILARITIES

Stylistically, all four writers added their own personal touches to the traditional form of autobiographical fiction. The experiences in their novels are basically depictions of counter culture street life, and their works are attempts to portray these experiences as honestly as possible. For example, Jack Kerouac, according to Seymour Krim, wrote of experiences "that had been hushed up or considered improper for literature."¹ The experiences recorded in their works range from the physical world of Henry Miller's whores and winos to the metaphysical contemplations of a drugged Sal Paradise atop the pyramids of Mexico, and although the characters assume fictitious names, they are thinly veiled representations of the actual personalities who roamed these subterranean worlds.

Aaron Latham thought Jack Kerouac had rediscovered this seemingly new form, "nonfiction in the form of a novel." He states that, "Kerouac pointed writers back toward real experience the way it really happened as a subject for serious prose. He changed the names but that was all..."²

¹Seymour Krim, Shake It For the World, Smartass (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1970), p. 196.

²Latham, p. 42.

Another critic contends, "The narrators of his (Kerouac's) novels, Jack Duluoz, Sal Paradise, Ray Smith, and Leo Percepied, are in fact Jack Kerouac. This artistic device has been used by other American writers who, taking their cue from Emerson's exhaltation of the individual, have done at least similar things: Walt Whitman, Thomas Wolfe, and even Henry Miller, for example."³ Kerouac may have propelled this style to the forefront of literary attention and influenced the growth, therefore, of the New Journalism of the 60's as seen, for instance, in the writings of Hunter Thompson, Tom Wolfe, Jimmy Breslin, and Truman Capote, but it was Henry Miller, churning out page after page of fictional non-fiction a decade before Kerouac, who planted the seed for the eventual growth and acceptance of this form. This autobiographical representation of experiences can also be seen in the drug-distorted realities of a Naked Lunch as well as in the metaphysical experiences of Kenneth Patchen's Albion Moonlight. The works all contain this element of autobiography; only the reality of experience changes.

If Kerouac did not actually revive this form of fictional non-fiction, he did, however, revive and add his own personal touch with the idea of spontaneous prose. Since the heroes of his novels were constantly trying to capture

³Granville H. Jones, "Jack Kerouac and the American Conscience," in Lectures on Modern Novelists (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1963), p. 26.

the spontaneity of the moment, trying to live in the here and now, Kerouac felt that the only way to capture the feeling of the restless search for self-identity and the true expression of the chaotic times was to make his prose work as close to that actual spontaneity as possible.

This spontaneity took on an almost musical quality with regards to the rhythm a writer needed to tune into. "The rhythm," Kerouac said, "of how you decide to 'rush' yr statement determines the rhythm of the poem, whether it is a poem in verse-separated lines, or an endless one-line poem called prose..."⁴ The rhythm surpassed any censoring or rationalizing or any such need to tamper with the flow. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. However, this automatic writing seemed to be one way of bypassing the technical obstacles of acceptable grammar and proper syntax which Kerouac believed hindered the descriptive impact of a scene. The rhythm of Kerouac's prose not only captured the vernacular of the time, which did not lend itself to grammatical structure, but it also captured the dynamic interactions of individuals, interactions which could not be properly expressed by adhering to a strict grammatical framework.

Kerouac attempted to unite the written word with the rhythm of jazz in order to adequately describe the action and speed of the mind along with the frantic acceleration of

⁴Donald Allen, The New American Poetry (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 414.

his generation. Ralph Gleason labeled On the Road: "a jazz novel in that it reflects, immediately and vividly, to those who have been stricken with the jazz virus, a knowledge and expression of their own struggle to get straight..."⁵ All the books which go to comprise the "Duluoz Legend" are filled with quick, exuberant riffs of exhilaration and liveliness alternating with low, sad notes of despair. Kerouac's prose is like the jazzman blowing free, unhindered, high on life one minute and sunk in the blues the next. This attention to rhythm in order to break through to a new rendition of experience is seen in the following example where Kerouac's prose sparks and flashes as he captures the frantic nature of Dean Moriarty:

Fury spat out of his eyes when he told of things he hated; great glows of joy replaced this when he suddenly got happy; every muscle twitched to live and go. "Oh, man, the things I could tell you," he said, poking me, "Oh, man, we must absolutely find the time - What has happened to Carlo? We all get to see Carlo, darlings, first thing tomorrow. Now, Marylou, we're getting some bread and meat to make a lunch for New York. How much money do you have, Sal? We'll put everything in the back seat, Mrs. P's furniture, and all of us will sit up front cuddly and close and tell stories as we zoom to New York. Marylou, honeythighs, you sit next to me, Sal next, then Ed at the window, big Ed to cut off drafts, whereby he comes into using the robe this time. And then we'll all go off to sweet life, 'cause now is the time and we all know time!" He rubbed his jaw furiously, he swung the car and passed three trucks, he roared into downtown

⁵Ralph Gleason, "Kerouac's Beat Generation," Saturday Review, 11 Jan. 1958, p. 75.

Testament, looking in every direction and seeing everything in an arc of 180 degrees around his eyeballs without moving his head.⁶

In the same rhythm, Kerouac described places and scenes of America in a rolling travelogue of non-stop images that brought the personality of the place to life. His prose participates in the experience and parallels the mental impulses that continuously register, consciously and unconsciously, our observations of the present environment. Seymour Krim describes Kerouac as "happily Popping our prose into a flexible flier of flawless observation, exactness of detail, brand-names, ice-cream colors,...all sorts of incongruously charming and touching aspects of reality that were too slender and evanescent to have gotten into our heavy-weight literature before."⁷ His novels sparkle with such rich, detailed descriptions as this one of San Francisco come to life:

...There were places where hamburgs sizzled on grills and the coffee was only a nickel. And oh, that pan-fried chow mein flavored air that blew into my room from Chinatown, vying with the spaghetti sauces of North Beach, the soft-shell crab of Fisherman's Wharf--nay, the ribs of Fillmore turning on spits! Throw in the Market Street chili beans, redhot, and frenchfried potatoes of the Embarcadero wino night, and steamed clams from Sausalito across the bay, and that's my ah-dream of San Francisco. Add fog, hunger-making raw fog, and the throb of neons in the soft night, the

⁶Kerouac, On the Road, p. 95.

⁷Introduction to Desolation Angels, pp. 15-16.

clack of high-heeled beauties, white doves in a Chinese grocery window...⁸

Kerouac would sketch his word images from memory in the same way a painter might sketch from memory while working on a still life with a "definite image-object" in mind.⁹ He substituted, in place of the conventional period, like a jazzman again, "vigorous space dashes separating rhetorical breathing."¹⁰

Through spontaneous or automatic writing, Kerouac's prose surged with emotion and action. The elements of language, like the notes in music, were developed into various rhythms, and as Kerouac's form illustrated the momentum of the content, his writings took on an added dimension. They not only began to show action; they became action. Kerouac defined his spontaneous prose:

Not 'selectivity' of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhaltation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang! (the space dash)--Blow as deep as you want--write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind.¹¹

⁸Kerouac, On the Road, p. 144.

⁹Krim, Shake It For the World, Smartass, p. 205.

¹⁰Krim, Shake It For the World, Smartass, p. 205.

¹¹Cook, p. 73.

This telepathic power of the word echoes Burroughs' concern for the power of the word-image and the connection of the individual minds to one universal Mind. As he states, Kerouac thought a writer should satisfy himself first and then the reader would receive a telepathic communication due to the same laws operating in his mind. Written without revision, without pauses, the prose took on a rhythm that "runs in time" so that the idea-image was placed on a continuum that was running, had been running, throughout time and, once both writer and reader were in tune with this continuum, there could be no lack of communication, no incomprehensibility. The writer was responsible to write from a level of the sub-conscious, before the thought completely solidified from the abstract to the concrete and was put into speech, where it was susceptible to censorship.¹² The thought forces were much more powerful on the sub-strata of conscious cognition.

It was this attention to technique that opened up new frontiers for these writers to explore. For Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise, the main characters in On the Road, the Old West frontier of homes on the range and peace and happiness was a thing of the past. Not only had the physical frontier of America dwindled but the spiritual frontier of America was, if not disappearing, becoming terribly confused. They found themselves, totally, at "the end

¹²Introduction to Desolation Angels, pp. 10-11.

of America." The freedom of discovering open horizons had necessarily to be redefined as a state of mind, and, consequently, the new frontiers became more and more abstract. It was not the frontier that the original pioneers felt rolling under the wagon wheel and spreading out before them. However, there was still that need to drive on into some untouched wonderland, like Huck Finn lighting out for the territory, where the pure spirit of America could be found. So they sped back and forth across the country with the burning need to move. They found it difficult to make the body stand still while the mind went looking for a frontier they were not even sure existed. The written word became Kerouac's medium to describe the search. The prose, like any frontier, became alive and fresh, relatively unexplored and, through it, all the friendships, the momentum, and the chaos of his sad, sad wanderings in lonely downtown America could be captured and preserved so that the experience would not lose its initial impact over time.

Spontaneous expression became a new, enjoyable freedom capable not only of preserving the present, but of keeping it eternally active as well. Concerns such as these prompted critics like John Tytell to write:

Jack Kerouac is right now our most misunderstood and underestimated writer. Like Henry Miller he was uninterested in the ideal of 'literary' perfection or in the orderly fiction of his time, believing that even seemingly immutable tastes could change. His writing was always excessive, disorderly, and unbalanced because he responded to entirely different imaginative priorities

than most writers of his time, not because he was unable to compose in the conventional mode of his first novel, The Town and the City...he seemed in touch with certain vitalities of the future, verities beyond the ken of the middle class...¹³

Unlike Burroughs, whose spontaneity took the form of mental images merging in a media montage or mobile, Kerouac depended upon physical images and experiences. Burroughs sought liberation through emerging, like Dante from hell, from mental torment and chaos. Kerouac, on the other hand, felt that speed was the determining variable for liberation, physical adrenalin leading to mental breakthroughs. Sal Paradise, in On the Road, declares, "We all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, move."¹⁴

The heroes of Kerouac's Road novels are constantly on the move, speeding back and forth across the country from New York to San Francisco to Mexico City back to New York or Denver. They were escaping from a society devoid of meaningful values and trying to find that lost frontier that offered, as the West offered the first pioneers, a new life, fresh horizons, a chance to grow in truth and beauty. There was a certain "purity of the road" that propelled Kerouac and Neal Cassady, the prototype for Dean Moriarty, along, and this same purity of expression propelled Kerouac's

¹³John Tytell, "Revisions of Kerouac," Partisan Review, Vol. XL, 1973, pp. 304-305.

¹⁴Kerouac, On the Road, p. 111.

prose. In great bursts of speed, he set out to break all boundaries between space and time in order to capture the present moment and keep it perpetually in motion.

Kerouac's "action writing" bridged the gap between perception and verbal communication of that perception. It was prose of the present. Kerouac knew, however, that he would have to step away from the "Eliot-Trilling-Older Generation" and risk contempt if he was to be honest with himself and record reality as he knew it. This task took "artistic dedication, courage, enormous capacity for work, indifference to the criticism which always hurts, an almost fanatical sense of necessity--"¹⁵ But Kerouac loved the language and was confident of his talent, and so, inspired by his own inner voice, he proceeded to record the urgent, hectic, promiscuous, underground world of the early 50's as he lived it. After Kerouac's death in 1969, Ann Charters would write of his ability: "As a literary artist he transformed his own existence full of suffering and enlarged it in his fiction to be greater than life. This constituted the force of his genius, of his originality."¹⁶

However, Kerouac's prose did not meet the standards set by the University English departments and literary quarterlies of the time so he was often criticized as a

¹⁵ Introduction to Desolation Angels, p. 12.

¹⁶ Charters, Kerouac, p. 354.

non-serious writer of be-bop, nonsensical prose. For example, Truman Capote is reported to have commented concerning Kerouac's prose: "That's not writing, it's just typewriting."¹⁷ Time magazine gave Kerouac the dubious honor of being "a kind of latrine laureate of Hobohemia."¹⁸ "As a handler of words," one critic complained, "Kerouac is often careless and slangy, the language often dripping colorlessly into an undifferentiated puddle."¹⁹ Samuel Bellman, writing in the Chicago Review, reasoned that the critics persecuted Kerouac "because his fictional characters do not attend Sunday School and because his stories do not have a beginning, a middle, and an end..."²⁰

In one sense, Kerouac was guilty of all these accusations. For example, it would be difficult to refute the claim that the following excerpt from Desolation Angels is not simply a hodge-podge of nonsense syllables thrown together in an off-hand manner:

I could go mad in this - O carryall menaya but
the weel may track the rattle-burr, poniac the
avoid devoidity runabout, minavoid the crail - Song
of my all the vouring me the part do rail-ing carry
all the pone--part you too may green and fly -

¹⁷Latham, p. 43.

¹⁸"The Blazing & The Beat," Time, 24 Feb. 1958, p. 104.

¹⁹Seymour Krim, "King of the Beats," The Commonweal, 2 Jan. 1959, p. 359.

²⁰Samuel Bellman, "On the Mountain," Chicago Review, Winter-Spring, 1959, p. 71.

welkin moon wrung salt upon the tides of come-on
 night, swing on the meadow shoulder, roll the
 boulder of Buddha over the pink partitioned west
 Pacific fog maw - O tiny tiny tiny human hope, O
 molded cracking thee mirror thee shook pa t n a wata-
 laka - and more to go - 21

It would also be difficult to attach any literary merit to the taped conversation in Visions of Cody. However, if one looks at the function of this nonsensical prose which riddles Kerouac's novels, rather than the expressed literary merit, one discovers that this prose was an attempt to break the mold of conventional fiction writing and open up new vistas, fresh horizons in the literary world.

But Kerouac was certainly not a solitary explorer in the field of experimental fiction. The novels of Miller, Patchen, and Burroughs also do not fit into plot boundaries. These writers hoped to propel their messages beyond the conventional boundaries of plot and story line. Their styles, consequently, flow like unrestricted rivers of thought. The characters take a secondary role to stylistic expression and the theme of self discovery. And few questions, if any, are resolved at the end of the novels. Because none of these authors had completed the search or attained the goals they had set for themselves, the novels were of necessity open-ended. The works were guide posts along the twisted road of life. Miller in his fiction and Kerouac in his (as well as

²¹Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p. 31.

Neal Cassady, instigator of the Beat Generation and the Hip Generation a decade later) were still looking for some lost frontier wherein lay truth and beauty. Burroughs was escaping from the Algebra of Need and still looked to expand his awareness. Patchen remained confused as to the nature of existence as seen in the conclusion he drew in The Journal:

One man sets a trap, another is snared; one man is damned, another is saved; one man kills his fellows, another himself; one man boasts in the temple, another weeps in his cell...O may the neck of God feel this embracing noose!...There is no way to end this book. No way to begin (pp. 309-313).

Rather than concentrating on plot development as the single most important element of the writing, these authors were interested in creating an individual style which would not hinder, but facilitate, their expression and observations of reality. The author who nova-exploded all conventions of style and standards and opened the door to experimental prose was William Burroughs, "the lead warrior in the battle against the enemy in the 3rd World War which is going on in the space between ourselves."²²

According to Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs was first encouraged to write by Kerouac. But it was Brion Gysin, Burroughs' close friend, who later influenced Burroughs'

²²Ken Kesey, Introduction to William Burroughs at the First Annual Poetic Heehaw and Spring Trip, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, June 1976.

style. Burroughs was obsessed with the power of the word. He felt, like Kerouac, that words held the key to telepathic communication between author and audience, and he was constantly trying to create images that exerted a strong impression upon the reader. Brion Gysin introduced Burroughs to the "cut-up method" around the time Burroughs was completing Naked Lunch for publication and together they published a novel called The Exterminator (1960). Burroughs used this method in subsequent stylistic experiments by making direct statements, cutting them up, and then rearranging them.²³ It is an interesting experiment to try and one which may yield two results: either, 1) the language is reduced to incoherent nonsense, or 2) the language presents new meanings and images which create new, more powerful interpretations of familiar experiences. Even before he was introduced to this method, however, Burroughs was developing a style of cutting and editing and connecting images in original ways. Burroughs remarks, "You can cut into Naked Lunch at any intersection point..." (p. 224). The novel is not contained or controlled. The images invoke repeated expressions of the theme.

The novel is a rampage. It is, as Mary McCarthy states, "alive, like a basketfull of crabs..."²⁴ Indeed,

²³Tony Tanner, "Rub Out the Word," City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970 by Tony Tanner (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 123-124.

²⁴McCarthy, p. 42.

the images rush upon the reader in an apparently chaotic fashion, bombarding one's sense of restraint and exploding one's neat little packet of reality. Yet it is still an accurate expression of today's hectic, chaotic pace and is nothing out of the ordinary from what we encounter every day. Comparing Naked Lunch to what one finds in the newspapers and television newscasts, Marshall McLuhan calls Burroughs' book, "...an endless succession of impressions and snatches of narrative. Burroughs is unique only in that he is attempting to reproduce in prose what we accommodate everyday as a commonplace aspect of life in the electric age."²⁵

Kerouac connected prose to music, Patchen united art and poetry, but Burroughs was one of the first, if not the first, to incorporate innovative discoveries in mass-media into the realm of literature. His works have more in common with the cinema than with traditional prose style. Bruce Cook, author of The Beat Generation, looked to Burroughs' movie script, The Last Words of Dutch Schultz, in an attempt to grasp some meaning for the merging images and changing voice of the author in Naked Lunch. The script's scenes jump from one image to another without any apparent order and yet, at the end of the script, one has a vivid, personal conception of Dutch Schultz's life and the events leading up

²⁵Marshall McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs," The Nation, 28 Dec. 1964, p. 517.

to his death. Cook explains, "For as nearly plotless as it is, it still makes sense, for mixing his images with the same speed and variety that he does in his later novels, Burroughs manages to achieve a flow, a structure that gives continuity and form to the whole."²⁶

Part of this continuity comes from the interchanging of cold, brutal images of drug addiction and control with scenes sparkling with a hangman's humor. This abrupt mixing of dark humor and dry wit tends to alleviate some of the burden of Burroughs' admittedly disgusting scenes, "Since Naked Lunch treats this health problem, it is often necessarily brutal, obscene, and disgusting. Sickness is often repulsive details not for weak stomachs."²⁷ The reprieve is short lived, however, and the reader finds himself plunged even deeper into the sink of human depravity through a later scene.

This technique of quick, rapid pacing also has its roots in the comedies of the 20's and 30's with such comedian/directors as Chaplin, Keaton, and Fields. And like the humor of the great comedies of early film which blasted the puritanical values, the racial bigotry, and the xenophobia of the country, the humor of Naked Lunch is brutally American. Burroughs has been called, "...the rawest, most brutally

²⁶Cook, p. 183.

²⁷Burroughs, Naked Lunch, p. xliv.

funny American writer since Ambrose Bierce."²⁸ and "peculiarly American, at once broad and sly."²⁹ Norman Mailer talks more specifically in describing Burroughs' humor. Invoking visions of the Chaplin Tramp, outcast from society's status quo, Mailer describes Burroughs' humor as:

...a species of gallows humor which is a defeated man's last pride, the pride that he has, at least, not lost his bitterness. So it is the sort of humor which flourishes in prisons, in the Army, among junkies, race tracks and pool halls, a graffiti of cool, even livid wit, based on bodily functions and the frailties of the body, the slights, humiliations and tortures a body can undergo. It is a wild and deadly humor, as even and implacable as a sales tax; it is the small coin of communication in every one of those worlds. Bitter as alkali, it pickles every serious subject in the caustic of the harshest experience; what is left untouched is as dry and silver as a bone.³⁰

Trying to describe humor, or comedy, is often like remembering the punch line but forgetting the joke. Sometimes one just has to be there. Burroughs' humor ranges from simple word puns, to definitions, ("A simopath--the technical name for this disorder escapes me--is a citizen convinced he is an ape or other simian. It is a disorder peculiar to the Army, and discharge cures it" [p. 37].), to entire scenes. For example, in Naked Lunch Dr. Benway performs a ludicrous surgery on a lady while reciting anecdotes

²⁸Cook, p. 167.

²⁹McCarthy, p. 42.

³⁰"Excerpts from the Boston Trial of Naked Lunch," Burroughs, Naked Lunch, p. xvii.

such as, "Did I ever tell you about the time I performed an appendectomy with a rusty sardine can?" (discussing the operation with the other doctor, Dr. Limpf), and when the lady dies, he addresses his students, "Now, boys, you won't see this operation performed very often and there's a reason for that...You see it has absolutely no medical value" (pp. 60-61). Then there is Burroughs' ear for diction and dialects which adds to his humor. Two notable examples include the southern drawl of the County Clerk and the carny slang of "The Prophet's Hour." The County Clerk tries civil cases in an old court house in Pigeon Hole where the inhabitants, being of "such great stupidity and such barbarous practices, have been quarantined by the Administration and have, in retaliation, plastered the town with signs reading: 'Urbanite Don't Let The Sun Set On You Here'" (p. 170). Our first encounter with the County Clerk finds him in the middle of a monotonous conversation:

I run into Ted Spigot the other day...a good old boy, too. Not a finer man in the Zone than Ted Spigot...Now it was a Friday I happen to remember because the Old Lady was down with the menstrual cramps and I went to Doc Parker's drugstore on Dalton Street, just opposite Ma Green's Ethical Massage Parlor, where Jed's old livery stable used to be... Now, Jed, I'll remember his second name directly, had a cast in his left eye and his wife came from some place out East, Algiers I believe it was... (p. 172).

and the wheels of justice grind to an agonizing halt. In the Prophet's Hour, all holy personalities are discussed in a new light:

"Buddha?" (for example, is seen as) "A notorious metabolic junky...Makes his own you dig. In India, where they got no sense of time, The Man is often a month late...'Now let me see, is that the second or the third monsoon? I got like a meet in Ketchupore about more or less.'

"And all the junkies sitting around in the lotus posture spitting on the ground and waiting for The Man.

"So Buddha says: 'I don't hafta take this sound. I'll by God metabolize my own junk.'

"'Man, you can't do that. The Revenooers will swarm all over you.'"

"'Over me they won't swarm. I gotta gimmick, see? I'm a fuckin Holy Man as of right now.'"

"'Jeez, boss, what an angle.'"³¹ (p. 114).

As with Chaplin's Tramp, the characters appear to be ludicrous yet the situation is sad.

Even the humor in Burroughs is harsh and violent and lacking in any soft, natural beauty. The images present an autobiographical sketch of a drug world characterized by homosexuality, heroin addiction, and the blue movie side of life. Burroughs himself was an addict for fifteen years and claims that many chapters were written while on heroin or during periods of withdrawal. Cook finds that:

There is no saving grace of love--not so much as a hint of it--to be found in his work. And his visions and routines, funny as they are so often, are just as often ruthless, nightmare visions of brutality, torture, and death. The Burroughs who writes the books is like the God who is always absent from the Hieronymous Bosch paintings, stern-faced yet secretly snickering (having made his judgment) at the sufferings of mankind.³¹

³¹Cook, p. 171.

Stylistically, Naked Lunch is not only a masterpiece of stunning images and dialogue written in an attempt to cut through the literary stopgaps of punctuation, but the novel is also a masterpiece of journalistic reporting of drug withdrawal. John Ciardi called Naked Lunch, "...a monumentally moral descent into the hell of narcotic addiction."³² But it is more than just a descent. It is also an ascent from this hell, like Dante's rising from the eternal abyss. As previously mentioned, Burroughs attempted to liberate the Self by breaking away from Control, be it narcotic control or social control.

Naked Lunch may be divided into three distinct sections describing three distinct stages of the drug experience. The first has to do with the shooting up of heroin and taking off, the metabolic changes and the distorted images which accompany the first flash of drug control. The second part, beginning at about page 74, is alive with a collage of wild, grotesque images and dream fragments as if one's mind and flesh are squirming under drug withdrawal. It is in this section where the symptoms of the "Cold Burn" are described. Finally, there is a sense of rest, of calmness, beginning with the section "Have you seen Pantopon Rose," as the addiction is broken and the images, like the

³²John Ciardi, "The Book Burners and Sweet Sixteen: An Editorial by John Ciardi," Saturday Review, 27 June 1959, p. 30.

nervous system, take on more coherence and a rational sequence resumes. Burroughs' narrator explains that, "I woke up with the taste of metal in my mouth back from the dead" (p. 234, italics added). On the one level, the images represent the withdrawal from drugs but from another perspective, the images all go to describe the withdrawal from control on all levels, and one realizes that, "...what Burroughs is writing about is not only the destruction of depraved men by their drug lust, but the destruction of all men by their consuming addictions, whether the addiction be drugs or overrighteous propriety,..."³³

As far as the function of a writer goes, Burroughs tells us, "There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing...I am a recording instrument...I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity'...In so far as [sic] I succeed in Direct recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function....I am not an entertainer..." (p. 221). Although the images are bizarre, there is a realistic approach to Naked Lunch. It was exactly how William Burroughs saw the world and functioned in the world.

Like Kerouac, Miller insisted that he was writing autobiography or "autobiographical romances."³⁴ And like

³³Ciardi, p. 30.

³⁴George Wickes, Henry Miller, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 56 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 19.

the other literary outlaws, Miller was determined to present an honest interpretation of his experience and world view even at the expense of stepping on some puritanical toes. His writing was an attempt to reach some depths of consciousness which would bring to light some meaning in all the confusion and pathetic living he saw going on around him. Similar to Kerouac's prose, Miller's writings expounded a sense of exuberance and unchecked enthusiasm through which he tried to create an order out of disorder. Whereas Kerouac was concerned with rhythm, Miller was concerned with 'the flow,' that fluidity which connected all beings and which flowed throughout the Cosmos. "'I love everything that flows'," Miller says, quoting Milton, "...I love everything that flows, everything that has time in it and becoming, that brings us back to the beginning where there is never end:..." (Cancer, p. 232). Miller threw himself into the jungles of humanity in an effort to understand the mechanics of Creation and his involvement with it. His prose style took all that chaos and put it on a continuum of coherence. Everything, Henry Miller seemed to be saying, is connected to everything else (even if only by a thin thread of imagination and illusion).

Tytell claims that both Miller's and Kerouac's writings went beyond the ideal of "literary perfection." All four of these authors were concerned with leaving an impact on the reader, and this concern took precedence over technical perfection. Burroughs warned the reader that he was

about to unleash his "word horde" and likewise, Miller, on page one of Tropic of Cancer, warns the reader not to expect a novel written in a traditional style. "This is not a book," Miller tells us. "This is libel, slander, defamation of character. This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty,..." Yet his insults jump off the pages as if he is screaming at us face to face, taking us by the lapels, shaking us, tearing at our clothes, trying to make us understand our nakedness. It is a mad, sincere raving that gives the work a personal and warm touch, if not often a telling and embarrassingly true statement about human behavior. Miller tried not to stand apart from his audience. He wanted his words to be as forceful and full of passion as the act of love itself. He wanted his words to draw him into an intimate relationship with the reader.

Miller, as a writer, has been described as:

...guilty of virtually every major fault that it is possible for a writer to be guilty of. Stylistically, his work is a botch...He has almost no sense of character--except his own--But...none of it seems really to matter...For in one respect, at least, we must take Miller at his word; he is not engaged in the act of writing literature. His work is, indeed, at bottom anti-literary...³⁵

And yet, the pages are graced with a command of the language and a love for the written word.

³⁵John Williams, "Henry Miller: The Success of Failure," Virginia Quarterly Review, Spring 1968, pp. 240-241.

Rather than worry about literary criticism and acceptance, Miller adopted a prose style which would exemplify the chaotic, meaningless nature of his existence and his attempt to reconcile this chaos. The titles of the two Tropics bear witness to the skill with which Miller composed his work. Both titles keep the reader sub-consciously aware of the boundaries which Miller was trying to break. Capricorn is the southern boundary of the Torrid Zone, the zone of passion where the body and soul squirm uncontrollably in orgasmic acceptance of the creative act and the burning fires of the Cosmos. The urgent, calloused sex throughout the novels speaks of the irrational fecundity of humankind that keeps man and woman slaves to lust (not love). And behind the experience is a style which drives the narrative along. "Sometimes, his writing even has the form of a fuck," writes Norman Mailer, "All the roar of passion, the flaming poetry, the passing crazy wit, and not an instant of intellectual precision, no products of Mind but insights which smack the brain like a bouncy tit which plops full of fucky happy presence over your nostrils..."³⁶ Tropic of Capricorn, concerning Miller's days in New York before he seriously decided to become a writer, suggests that "strange Capricornian condition of embryosis" in which "God the he-goat ruminates in stolid bliss among the mountain peaks" (Capricorn, p. 204).

³⁶"Henry Miller," American Review #24, p. 16.

Cancer is the northern boundary of the Torrid Zone. Cancer is also the Twentieth Century malignancy that devours cellular structure and destroys the system, any system, including the whole world-humanity complex. "The world is a cancer eating itself away..." laments Miller. But there is also the Cancer of Time. Miller modifies the above statement to, "The cancer of time is eating us away. Our heroes have killed themselves, or are killing themselves. The hero, then, is not Time, but Timelessness." The latitudes of the Tropics come to represent boundaries which contain that which should not be containable, the human spirit or one's full consciousness--"an inexhaustible ocean which gives itself to sun and moon and also includes the sun and moon" (Capricorn, p. 332). Likewise, Miller's prose flows in a manner which cannot be contained or adequately comprehended through an elementary analysis of such things as plot structure or character development.

For example, to add more interpretations to the titles--the astrological sign for cancer is the Crab and from this comes the rather crude association with the colloquial term for the crab-like pubic lice whose occurrence was accepted as part of the trade in Miller's Paris. They were part of life, part of the little sufferings that gnaw away at human existence. Cancer, in general, may be defined as "any spreading evil." Capricorn is the ancient goat and reminiscent of the Old Testament blood sacrifices

where the blood was wiped on the golden horns which adorned the four corners of the tabernacle's altar. Throughout the works there is this contrast between the ancient atonement for sins and the present-day cancer that ravages the system and makes a wasteland of the soul. The Crab hangs silently from the constellation and watches the world go past.

Miller sends out the warning that, "Wherever there are walls, there are posters with bright venomous crabs heralding the approach of cancer. No matter where you go, no matter what you touch, there is cancer and syphilis. It is written in the sky; it flames and dances, like an evil portent. It has eaten into our souls and we are nothing but a dead thing like the moon" (Cancer, p. 167).

Like the universe, Miller's style is at once broad and impressive with an infinite range of imagination. For example, contemplating the simple price of a whore in Paris, Miller expands his thoughts into a comment on war and the condition of a man trapped by a situation whose initial cause has lost its importance:

We haven't any passion either of us. And as for her, one might as well expect her to produce a diamond necklace as to show a spark of passion. But there's the fifteen francs and something has to be done about it. It's like a state of war: the moment the condition is precipitated nobody thinks about anything but peace, about getting it over with. And yet nobody has the courage to lay down his arms, to say, "I'm fed up with it...I'm through." No, there's fifteen francs somewhere, which nobody gives a damn about any more and which nobody is going to get in the end anyhow, but the fifteen francs is like the primal cause of things and rather than listen to one's own voice, rather

than walk out on the primal cause, one surrenders to the situation, one goes on butchering and butchering and the more cowardly one feels the more heroically does he behave, until a day when the bottom drops out and suddenly all the guns are silenced and the stretcher-bearers pick up the maimed and bleeding heroes and pin medals on their chest. Then one has the rest of his life to think about the fifteen francs. One hasn't any eyes or arms or legs, but he has the consolation of dreaming for the rest of his days about the fifteen francs which everybody has forgotten. (Cancer, pp. 128-129).

Like Kerouac's, his prose reads in a spontaneous flow, a rapid conversation, almost, that somehow connects an endless series of unconnected ideas in one's mind. He writes of the low life, of the sewers of humanity, clogged with the bile of a million meaningless human conversations.

Form, as well as content, was important to all four authors. They experimented with styles until they found the one which would most successfully accommodate what they wished to say. Miller himself approached writing as an extension of an oral tradition. "It is," as Lawrence Lipton states, "the spoken word committed to writing."³⁷ Anais Nin, in a preface to Tropic of Cancer, lauds Miller for creating a novel which "brings with it a wind that blows down the dead and hollow trees whose roots are withered and lost in the barren soil of our times. This book goes to the roots and digs under, digs for subterranean springs" (Cancer, p. xxxi).

³⁷ Lawrence Lipton, The Holy Barbarians (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1959), p. 227.

The chaos evident in an age wracked with atomic power, social upheaval, and the growing pains of technology played a major factor in the style of these authors. Burroughs, Kerouac, and Miller were searching for some order in the midst of chaos, but it was The Journal of Albion Moonlight that most successfully captured the emotional chaos of the time. Patchen explains why he wrote his novel in the form of a journal:

The true journal can have no plan for the simple reason that no man can plan his days. Do you seriously doubt this? I did. I ventured forth early this summer with a definite project in my mind: It was my intention to set down the story of what happened to myself and to a little group of my friends--and I soon discovered that what was happening to us was happening to everyone. (p. 305).

Like Miller, Patchen carried along a conversational tone, but where Miller seemed to be theatrically debating some point about the universe, perhaps his tie loosened and shirt tail flying, Patchen presents an image of a rational man sitting calmly in the room, his eyes fixed intently, wildly into our own, and explaining to us, "The great gray plague--the plague of universal madness."

The form which Patchen created paralleled the madness he tried to explain. "To say what is on his mind," Richard Hack writes in the Chicago Review, "Patchen used a wild formless form that includes five or six little novels (often just tables of contents) within the larger novel; plus random notes and maxims, among the shifting scenery, a

thousand fragments of plot, prayers, screams, mad speeches, prose poetry of the kind that Joyce made famous, socialist theory, endless bedroom and battlefield tableaux,..."³⁸ His style was similar to Burroughs' in that the images flash one upon the other, the scenes jump continuously, even time is disjointed, and the characters have no sustaining or predictable qualities, except that they may change at any instant from a saint to a murderer. And it is just as Patchen saw the capacity of individuals. His journal is a record of the world gone mad in the 1940's. "I have traced its origins," Albion Moonlight declares, speaking of the universal madness, "defined its boundaries, shown its course. It was too late to write a book; it was my duty to write all books. I could not write about a few people; it was my role to write about everyone" (p. 305).

Performing his duty, then, Patchen managed to write a secondary novel within the main novel. He added another novel in the margins. Plus, now and again, there are a series of phrases which read like billboard or Burma Shave signs along the road (after all, Moonlight and Company are on a journey). There are reports to Rovies, the Holy Savior who waits for the group in Goshen, the promised land. In addition, there are poems, pictures, and lists that are

³⁸Richard Hack, "Memorial Poetry Reading for Kenneth Patchen at City Lights Poets Theatre San Francisco: Feb. 2, 1972," Chicago Review, 24, No. 2 (1972), 75.

included in the journal and which hint at the emotional intricacies and instability of modern man and woman. There are thought fragments which act as life preservers in Patchen's sea of madness and direct the reader back to the various themes. For example, in different sections of the novel we find such journal statements as: "I awakened this morning and screamed when I touched my body. I can't get used to it (p. 220)... 'To destroy your enemies' is another way of saying to destroy (p. 279)... When we are full we lose interest in that which has filled us--whether it be God or art--is that why I am drifting off into other lines?" (p. 302). Patchen even went so far in describing the unpredictability of the human being that he created characters who became uncontrollable. The characters often challenge the author and act in ways which, Patchen tells us, were not intended. "You will realize that my characters are dangerous to me," Patchen explains, "God knows! they may decide to walk out of the book at any time, leaving me to carry on as best I can" (p. 146). Throughout the novel the character's self-identity is as unstable as the world in which he lives.

The Journal of Albion Moonlight abounds in complexities, questions, catchy phrases and food for thought that play upon one's sense of guilt and what is right and wrong. "You will be told that what I write is confused, without order--" admits Albion, "and I tell you that my book is not

concerned with the problems of art, but with the problems of this world, with the problems of life itself--yes, of life itself" (p. 200). Like Kerouac and the rest, Patchen was concerned with finding a value structure in a valueless society, or one whose values were certainly on the slide. As Hack states, "He not only expands the language, stretches concepts of what is art, and throws down a heavy challenge to literary criticism, but he also expresses a tremendous variety of human attitudes and feelings, including a gamut of ecstatic states (love, hate, fear, flying, falling, giving birth, dying, killing, madness, revelation, living in another world, etc.)"³⁹ Dualities do not exist for Albion Moonlight. Nothing is that simple. As he says, "There is evil in good and there is good in evil; but there is no bad good and no good bad" (p. 143), and to prove the point, Patchen exploded traditional literary structure and gave an honest interpretation of man's emotional flexibility (and instability).

The journal is a mixture of abrupt images, themes of war and religion, of birth (beginning in the Spring and with the birth of the Christ child), shifting voices, and novels within novels. The message is one of chaos, and the chaotic structure contains the search for some sanity in the midst of madness, some happiness beyond the sufferings of war. Like the other three writers of autobiographical fiction,

³⁹Hack, p. 76.

Patchen proposed some hope, some belief in an order underlying disorder, and Moonlight and company progress steadily onward in an attempt to escape the madness. This attitude of hope is approached by way of recognizing the vast amount of potential still to be used by the individual:

I believe that the minds of men--(one of the characters in The Journal of Albion Moonlight states) or I should say 'mind', since they all came from the same shop--will change; I believe that all the old pictures will fade out, and new ones will take their place; I believe that what we have in our heads now is only one of millions of possible seeings; I believe that the man animal got started on the wrong foot...I believe that the revolutions of the future will be concerned with altering the minds of men, with vomiting out all that is insane for his animal. (pp. 298-299).

Whether dragging the reader through the dregs of society or expounding the evils of war, these authors maintained a note of optimism. They felt that the individual, if prodded, would strive toward some greater use of his inherent mental potential. This optimism was an optimism which grew from a land which had believed in Manifest Destiny for so long, which had always seen a better life or another chance for the individual over the next hill. Through their style and technique, these authors strove to keep alive the American ideal of freedom and independence.

Chapter 4

THE LAND AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THEMATIC STRUCTURE

While it proved eventually possible, at an exceedingly heavy cost, to defeat the Germans, the dear Americans have vigorously assumed their place. Who shall bring them back to their senses? The Germans calamity of years ago repeats itself: people acquiesce without resistance and align themselves with the forces of evil. And one stand by, powerless.¹

Miller, Patchen, Burroughs, and Kerouac refused to "acquiesce without resistance" and were drawn together in the traditional role of the American outsider in search of freedom. With the advance of post World War II economy, America was falling into "The blind following of conventional moral codes, which one neither believes in nor understands," and which led to "a boring conformity."² By 1960 a lonely and despairing Jack Kerouac and a companion poet, Lew Welch, driving down to visit Neal Cassady at Los Gatos, could not help but see "the endless housing tracts sprawling alongside the freeway, the mushrooming factories breaking out on the hills all around them."³ They were the Huck Finns and Chaplin Tramps of modern society. Appalled at the hypocrisy of a political system that taught democracy and freedom on

¹Albert Einstein, in a letter to the Queen of Belgium, in Jeremy Bernstein, Einstein (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 229.

²Jones, "Jack Kerouac and the American Conscience," p. 30.

³Charters, Kerouac, p. 326.

the one hand only to suppress freedom of expression on the other, they broke away from the accepted value system and leveled criticism upon this country at a time when the American Dream was being transformed into a Sunday afternoon barbecue. When, finally, these four outlaws evolved into a generation of young rebels, parents would stand dumbfounded in greasy aprons wondering what was happening or where they had gone wrong.

Western thought has traditionally divided mind and matter into separate entities and such beliefs led to the rise of objectivity. This rigid separation distorts man's place in Nature, and the pragmatic values which accompany this philosophy had outlived their usefulness by mid-Twentieth Century. The division between the spiritual and the material fossilized any progressive thought processes and created a technology which was completely object-oriented, indifferent to the individual's subjective need to expand his awareness in order to utilize more creativity and intelligence. The disharmony between man and nature which was established through such division turned many of the subterranean poets and authors to Indian and Chinese thought which did not "distinguish sharply between the spiritual and the material but rather regarded the world as a continuum..."⁴

⁴Anthony Campbell, TM and the Nature of Enlightenment (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 12.

These authors' works illustrate an attempt to understand the nature of man and the universe through a mixture of intuition and direct experience. For them, American technology was ruining the individual's sense of self by mass-produced gadgetry and junk consumerism, by encouraging the growth of the "organizational man" in briefcase and gray flannel suit. This, again, was the era of conformity to middle-class values and the growth of suburbia. They exemplified the fictional anti-heroes of the literary world fighting to maintain some sense of self awareness and identity just as John Garfield, James Dean, and Marlon Brando emerged on screen as the individual confronting some unseen establishment and trying to champion the cause of the individual.

Erich Fromm, in his book Escape from Freedom, called attention to the 'specialist' as one main factor in an individual's loss of identity and consequently his loss of freedom. Every human being longs for the truth and as Fromm states, the Socratic maxim of "'Know thyself' is one of the fundamental commands that aim at human strength and happiness."⁵ It was at this time, with the growth of technology and reliance on the expert as authority, that individuals began to surrender their attitudes to those who claimed to be better equipped to handle the social, psychological, political, and economic issues. The subterranean writers, along with the counter culture they fostered, refused to believe

⁵Fromm, p. 275.

in a system that dictated behavior.

Fromm claims that the specialist "tends to discourage people from trusting their own capacity to think about those problems that really matter."⁶ Built into this kind of thinking is the self-fulfilling prophecy. Tell an individual how he should act and what he should think and before long, the individual will think, feel, and act according to how he believes he is supposed to think, feel, and act. Then tell the individual that, because of the growing technology, experts must be called in to decipher the complex systems of information, and the individual not only loses any sense of self but he also begins to believe that the system is so complex that he could not possibly understand it. Then, busily determining how he should act, the individual soon forgets even to question the system. He has lost his self, on "which all genuine security of a free individual must be built."⁷ He is controlled by the forces which William Burroughs condemns in Naked Lunch.

Freedom comes from a process of self liberation or self realization. It cannot be legislated or imposed by outside dictates. The heroes of Subterranean Prose fought for the freedom to discover the self. "This is the story of America." claims Sal Paradise in On the Road, "Everybody's

⁶Fromm, p. 276.

⁷Fromm, p. 280.

doing what they think they're supposed to do."⁸ During this time, there was a big push for acceptance of the melting-pot theory. Sociologists and other social-behavioralists thought it desirable for all cultures to merge into one giant, amorphous American culture, to become part of the mainstream of middle-class American life. There was a push towards conformity, and consequently, an attempt to smother minority cultures which had the additional result of negating an individual's self worth. Like the traditional pioneer discovering new frontiers and refusing to be fenced in by advancing civilization, these authors attempted to escape from this growing absurdity in America. Two of them, Miller and Burroughs, became expatriates, while the other two, Kerouac and Patchen, looked for new horizons in their own country, searching, perhaps, for some legendary myth of freedom.

What happens to a man who does not expand his awareness, who does not try to "know himself?" Erich Fromm claims that he "conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more he is forced to conform."⁹ Once the cycle begins, it becomes continuous. Once he becomes controlled, the victim is permanently controlled. One is sure of himself only if he can live up to the expectations

⁸Kerouac, On the Road, p. 57.

⁹Fromm, p. 281.

of others. And there are certain symbols that represent the authority which maintains the status quo. In Naked Lunch, Burroughs creates a haunting description of the police as symbolic of this authority. Because of his long drug habit and the shooting of his wife during a modern version of the Wilhelm Tell story, Burroughs was always wary of the police and naturally saw the authority and control administered by the police as representative of the evil inherent in America. In America, there were "always cops: smooth college-trained state cops, practiced, apologetic patter, electronic eyes weigh your car and luggage, clothes and face; snarling big city dicks, soft-spoken country sheriffs with something black and menacing in old eyes color of a faded grey flannel shirt..." (p. 11).

Burroughs found that sense of American freedom only after he left America. "Something falls off you," he says, "when you cross the border into Mexico, and suddenly the landscape hits you straight with nothing between you and it..."¹⁰ Likewise, it was no coincidence that in On the Road, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty found a purity of freedom only after they crossed the border on the way into Mexico. "There's no suspicion here," Dean cries in wonder, "...Everybody's cool, everybody looks at you with such straight brown eyes and they don't say anything, just look, and in that look all of the human qualities are soft and

¹⁰Burroughs, Naked Lunch, p. 14.

subdued and still there...people here are straight and kind and don't put down any bull."¹¹ Even the Mexican police are described as "tender."

For Burroughs, America was a land filled with hate. In this type of atmosphere there was no room for self-development or creative enterprise. He considered Democracy to be cancerous and bureaus to be its cancer. "A bureau," he says, "takes root anywhere in the state, turns malignant like the Narcotic Bureau, and grows and grows, always reproducing more of its own kind, until it chokes the host if not controlled or excised" (p. 134).

The conformity which was polluting the individual's psychological environment was treated as any other addiction in Burroughs' Naked Lunch. He saw Americans as addicted to power and control and unable to act spontaneously, unable to "let things happen without interference" (p. 215). As Bryant states:

The world of the addict, which Burroughs depicts, stands for the larger world. Both infect their citizens with a 'human Virus', a psychological sickness that destroys the human being, his spontaneous love, and his authentic impulses. The symptoms of this virus are 'poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity.' The world in which these symptoms appear is one of hideous deformity and terrible perversions, where crabmen devour the translucent flesh of moldy old men, and giant black centipedes, metamorphosed form men, scuttle about in a landscape of Kafkaesque horror.¹²

¹²Bryant, p. 203.

The writings of Burroughs may easily be applied to existing conditions in the world but in one sense, Burroughs wrote in a microcosm, too preoccupied with opening new doors of experience to concern himself with the problems of society at large. He had no definite political stand, for example. He fought the creative stagnation of the country by ignoring it and going his own way. There was no conscious attempt to change the system from within for Burroughs and there was likewise no attempt at changing the system from without. Like Miller and Kerouac, Burroughs chose to be indifferent to the system and he, along with Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso, Orlovsky, Cassady, Snyder, Ferlinghetti, and others, created their own counter culture. Burroughs was always looking for that special 'kick' that would expand his awareness. He states in Junkie, written in 1950, that "Kick is seeing things from a special angle. Kick is momentary freedom from the claims of the aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh."¹³ Rather than recommending junk or narcotics, as is sometimes supposed, Burroughs wisely advised against its use, explaining that junk was not a means to increased enjoyment of life. "Junk is not a kick." he tells us, "it is a way of life."¹⁴

In a foreword to Junkie, Carl Soloman gives an

¹³William Burroughs, Junkie (New York: Ace Books, 1953), p. 126.

¹⁴Burroughs, Junkie, p. 11.

additional insight into Burroughs' life style:

In life he is a peculiar kind of adventurer, seeking out what is unusual or unexplored in our sensibilities or in our way of living. Pursuing what is increasingly hard to find, the unknown, Burroughs has not yet become redundant and his curiosity is not yet exhausted. In this respect he is unlike many other so-called avant-gardists and poets who once experimented but then reclined on their couches and ruefully admitted that there was nothing new under the sun.¹⁵

In Naked Lunch, as in Miller's Tropics, Burroughs' exploration took the form of going beyond the barriers of sex in society. One of the countries, for example, in Naked Lunch is a country of "commerce and sex." The two are transacted simultaneously and the implication for our own society is obvious. The individuals in Burroughs' country have lost all sense of priority and decency and have become ignorant of the common bond between individuals.

Burroughs would have been handcuffed in his research had he paid attention to America's restrictions of expression. In a letter Edward De Grazia read before the court at the trial of Naked Lunch, Burroughs defended his book by saying, "Unless and until a free examination of sexual manifestations is allowed, man will continue to be controlled by sex rather than controlling. A phenomena totally unknown because deliberately ignored and ruled out as a subject for writing and research" (p. xxxv).

Burroughs, then, was a researcher. He explored

¹⁵Burroughs, Junkie, p. 6.

specific aspects of social behavior in order to free the individual from barriers. His work expounded freedom and spontaneity while at the same time describing the potential apocalypse of a world operating through the tentacles of control.

Burroughs did offer a solution to avoiding the wasteland, however. Marshall McLuhan explains it as follows:

The Burroughs diagnosis is that we can avoid the inevitable 'closure' that accompanies each new technology by regarding our entire gadgetry as junk. Man has hopped himself up by a long series of technological fixes:

'You are dogs on all tape. The entire planet is being developed into terminal identity and complete surrender.'

We can forego the entire legacy of Cain (the inventor of gadgets) by applying the same formula that works for junk--'apomorphine' extended to all technology.¹⁶

Burroughs would have a society where the individual's self worth is valued above one's ability to possess a new Buick Electra or the latest nail polish from Paris.

Kenneth Patchen also thought America was a place where it was easier to die than it was to give birth, to create. Always seeking after that which offered a sense of wonder and beauty, Patchen rejected the social conventions which were turning men into extensions of the large corporate war machine. As America was enthusiastically preparing for war, Patchen went his outlaw way and declared that this

¹⁶McLuhan, p. 518.

type of progress would lead to a wasteland devoid of creativity and not to a utopia. He described a city in The Journal of Albion Moonlight where the national sport was one of shooting each other out of balloons but where the people did not die. "The real truth is," Albion tells us, "that these people are dead; what they fear is life. When they 'die', they are transported to Hannibal, Missouri, where they must remain for all time" (p. 136). It was no coincidence that he picked Hannibal, the city from whose constricting society Huck Finn escaped.

These authors created characters who sought that freedom which comes from within the individual and offered a sense of fulfillment and wholeness. What they saw around them was the act of murder. If one may was not killing another man, then he was killing his own experience through boredom. And as one relinquished the opportunity to find true freedom, to experience a wholeness and integration of mind, body, and spirit, then one began to die from the inside. One became a hollow shell or like Ibsen's Peer Gynt, one could not find the center of his being. Echoing T. S. Eliot's description of the hollow men, Patchen saw this country as one which harbors death. "America is the biggest cemetery that was ever on the face of the earth," he writes. "Everybody is dead here. Everybody! Rot and stench--a stinking slop pail--every least thing that could be crapped-up for the sake of a nickel has been buried under in filth--

did I say death? Well, I was wrong...there's no death here--only a dying;" (p. 288).

Kerouac and Patchen remained in America and lived on the streets and roadways among those who relished life, yet they were related to the expatriates, Miller and Burroughs, through this common idea: they all considered America to be dead or dying. It was the reason they turned outlaw and dug for "subterranean springs." It was the reason they searched for alternative lifestyles. Burroughs and Miller left America to escape this confinement of death. One of the embodiments of this death and dishonesty in America was the intellectual. Patchen spoke not only for these authors but for a large portion of his generation when he advised, "Scratch an intellectual and you'll find an ill-literate, pompous, cock-sure, inconsiderate, stoop-shouldered, mouse-colored nincompoop smelling of cafeterias and steam heat" (p. 151).

However, it was not simply the intellectual but the land itself which these authors saw as threatening. It was not so much the people who went to make up the character of the land, but it was the land which imposed its own characteristics upon the development of the people. The environment, the geographical conditions, the varied cultures, all interacted to form an atmosphere which in turn structured the behavior of the people. Miller expresses this idea of America and the violence it breeds not as a result of the

inhabitants but as a result of the inherent nature of the land:

The whole country is lawless, violent, explosive, demoniacal. It's in the air, in the climate, in the ultra-grandiose landscape, in the stone forests that are lying horizontal, in the torrential rivers that vire through the rocky canyons, in the supra-normal distances, the supernal arid wastes, the overlush crops, the monstrous fruits, the mixture of quixotic bloods, the fatras of cults, sects, beliefs, the opposition of laws and languages, the contradictoriness of temperaments, principles, needs, requirements. The continent is full of buried violence, of the bones of antediluvian monsters and of lost races of man, of mysteries which are wrapped in doom. The atmosphere is at times so electrical that the soul is summoned out of the body and runs amok. (Capricorn, pp. 41-42).

Likewise Patchen felt crucified by the violence inherent in America's history. Patchen saw the country being flooded in a great river of blood, and we hear Albion plead desperately, "Indeed, my friends, we are all drowning--it covers our faces, it drips from our hands...O Jesus! Jesus! Lord have mercy on us...Lord have mercy!" (p. 200).

It would be erroneous to state that, while these authors condemned America for what it was doing to the individual value system, they stood behind some other national creed. They did not. They were not nationalists or patriots but rather, they believed in the independence of the individual and the brotherhood of man. Henry Miller, the original boho, considered America to be a blight on human existence but Paris was not much better. He writes in Tropic of Cancer that, upon arriving in Paris, "I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man

alive" (Cancer, p. 1). He had rejected the materialism and the Horatio Alger myth of ambition/success for a little peace of mind. Miller, like the other literary outsiders, stepped away from the world and created his own.

America offered only disillusionment and despair for Miller. It aborted any attempt at creativity and originality. Miller saw the streets of America all combining and forming "a huge cesspool of the spirit in which everything is sucked down and drained away to everlasting shit" (Capricorn, p. 12). America had lost its innocence but maintained her illusions of virginity. "It's best to keep America just like that, always in the background," Miller writes from Paris, "a sort of picture post card which you look at in a weak moment. Like that, you imagine it's always there waiting for you, unchanged, unspoiled, a big patriotic open space with cows and sheep and tenderhearted men ready to bugger everything in sight, man, woman or beast. It doesn't exist, America. It's a name you give to an abstract idea..." (Cancer, p. 187). America became a myth and the myth suggested a past of freedom and open frontiers. It was a myth that Kerouac fondly admired and which he strove to discover, but even he knew that he was chasing something which did not exist. He was involved in a frantic, desperate search for America, but he realized that the physical frontiers had all vanished, that they may not have even existed. "Here I was at the end of America," Sal Paradise

says, standing on the shores of the Pacific, "--no more land--and now there was nowhere to go but back."¹⁷ Like Sisyphus rolling his rock eternally up a hill, Kerouac needed to continue the search even in the face of hopeless

. Without the search, America was, indeed, a wasteland.

Kerouac and Miller, perhaps more than Patchen and Burroughs, realized that the only wilderness left to conquer and explore was the wilderness of the soul. Yet even this wilderness was being exploited by what Miller called the cheap idealism of America. The key word in America today is 'efficiency' and humans have become slaves to computers. "What he hates most in America," one critic writes about Miller, "is the utilitarian cult of progress, efficiency, and the machine, all of which he sees as dehumanizing, soul-destroying forces."¹⁸ Miller saw through the facade of America, which professed to be the richest land in the world. "Outwardly it seems to be a beautiful honeycomb, with all the drones crawling over each other in a frenzy of work;" Miller admits, "inwardly it's a slaughterhouse, each man killing off his neighbor and sucking the juice from his bones. Superficially it looks like a bold, masculine world; actually it's a whorehouse run by women, with the native sons acting as pimps and the bloody foreigners

¹⁷Kerouac, On the Road, p. 66.

¹⁸Wickes, pp. 5-6.

selling their flesh" (Capricorn, p. 42).

Miller tore apart the American dream. He considered America to be a whore, a fur slipping from her shoulder, bearing down on him, not letting him escape. She was "America moving like a streak of lightning toward the glass warehouse of red-blooded hysteria. Amurrica, fur or no fur, shoes or no shoes, Amurica C.O.D. And scram, you bastards, before we plug you!...Swift, ruthless, imperious, like Fate itself she is on me, a sword cutting me through and through..." (Capricorn, p. 342, Miller's italics). America left little room for the discovery of the self and the expression of creativity. Only the myth of America advertised this freedom.

It was this myth of freedom mixed with the reality of mid-Twentieth Century America which flows from the pages of Kerouac's Road novels. The maddening, irresponsible treks back and forth across the country were an attempt by Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise to find a home, some roots and remembrance of a lost America. They envisioned the country "like an oyster for us to open; and the pearl was there, the pearl was there."¹⁹ They searched endlessly for a past they thought offered some values that were missing in their present day society. But like Huck Finn, every place they stopped they found something amiss. John Clellon Holmes

¹⁹Kerouac, On the Road, p. 115.

explains that "in the 'Cody' books, Kerouac expresses most clearly his vision of America, 'an Egyptian land' at once cruel and tender, petty and immense."²⁰

At the beginning of his career, Kerouac was alive with a zest for living and this vitality came through in the characters of his novels who were "mad to live." He was dissatisfied with the growing conformity and the lack of spontaneity which seemed to be manifested in the behavior of the majority of Americans. The hoboos of Kerouac's novels "reflected a growing uneasiness in America, a gnawing sense that all was not well in the richest land in the world. Their frantic flights across country, their rootless and disaffected behavior, but above all their profound sense of disaffiliation, testified to a growing spirit of discontent. In going on the road they gave expression, in the clearest and most direct way possible, to all the repressed longings and vague dissatisfactions abroad in the populace at large."²¹ With an eye for finding some new frontiers and open horizons, Kerouac's hoboos enthusiastically began what would culminate in the counter culture of the 60's. This flight to freedom was exemplified in Kerouac's works, as Bruce Cook tells us: "There must be nearly a hundred quotable eloquent examples of Kerouac on the art of travel. And in all of them there

²⁰John Clellon Holmes, Nothing More to Declare (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1967), p. 76.

²¹Feied, pp. 58-59.

is such freedom, such an obvious feeling of optimism and joy...He is what the Beats have most in common with Mark Twain, the Wobblies, Jack London, and all those hobo heroes of American literature."²²

After a decade of unpublished prose, however, Kerouac's romanticism became tarnished by his sense of reality. The hope of some untapped freedom and ideal of American past remained with Kerouac, but the hope became less and less an actuality. Kerouac had spent ten years traveling throughout America, believing in America, creating an American history, and his prose was quite revealing as to the character of the American culture. By the time On the Road was published, it was already a decade old, and he had encountered the politics behind the publishing business. The exploits which would create the Beat Generation were only memories to Kerouac and Cassady. As Holmes states in Nothing More to Declare:

Though he (Kerouac) has already created a larger body of work than any of his contemporaries, to most people his name summons up the image of a carefree do-nothing sensation-hunter. Though that body of work creates a dense, personal world that is as richly detailed as any such American literary world since Faulkner, he is continually thought to be nothing but the poet of the pads and the bard of bebop. And though he is a prose innovator in the tradition of Joyce, whose stylistic experiments will bear comparison with any but the most radical avant-gardists of the century, he is constantly ticketed as some slangy, hitch-hiking Jack London, bringing a whiff of marijuana and truck exhaust

²²Cook, p. 39.

into the lending libraries. In short, the kind of writer that only America could produce, and that only America could so willfully misunderstand. One has only to remember Melville 'the writer of boy's sea stories' and Whitman 'the author of O Captain, My Captain' to recognize what legacy of national neglect Kerouac has fallen heir to.²³

What sustained Kerouac through these years was his love of writing and his love of life. What destroyed him was the narrow vision of an American public and literary circle that called for a cramped literary style and, inadvertently, the stagnation of American literature.

The quest for freedom was slowly exhausting its last resources. Unlike Huck Finn, who could escape into new, unexplored frontiers, Kerouac felt the perimeters of the country closing in on him. Kerouac saw the desert of loneliness and isolation creeping over America; he recognized the growing paranoia and distrust that led to the ultimate sin, "lifelessness." Kerouac praised Cassady for having the kind of blood that got hot, "hot for old lovers like Joanna, for old pleasure like marijuana and talk, for jazz, for the gayety that any respectable American wants in a life growing more arid by the year in Law Ridden America."²⁴

For all their exploits, for all their raw, crazed wildness through the nights of jazz and sex and booze and dope and fast cars for joy rides, Kerouac and Cassady avoided

²³Holmes, Nothing More to Declare, p. 68.

²⁴Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p. 354.

violence. They believed in the peace found within the soul; they believed all men were brothers in some eternal bond. This idea of passivity was one factor that led to their acceptance of Buddhism and Eastern thought. In the police they saw the embodiment of violence, a violence born out of boredom. In a piece about the hobo tradition entitled "The Vanishing American Hobo," Kerouac associated this boredom with the decline of that great American tradition:

The American Hobo is on the way out as long as sheriffs operate with as Louis-Ferdinand Celine said, 'One line of crime and nine of boredom,' because having nothing to do in the middle of the night with everybody gone to sleep they pick on the first human being they see walking.-- They pick on lovers on the beach even. They just don't know what to do with themselves in these five-thousand dollar police cars with the two-way Dick Tracy radios except pick on anything that moves in the night and in the daytime on anything that seems to be moving independently of gasoline, power, Army or police.²⁵

Admittedly, in those lonely moments when he was at the world's end, Kerouac would wish for the "pink sweater of security" and dream of the day when he and Cassady would live in the same neighborhood with family and white picket fence, but he was too eager to jump for the next experience (hoping to find some increasing fulfillment) ever to settle down during his active years. The police restricted this freedom of movement. At ~~one~~ one time, Kerouac was stopped outside Tucson, Arizona, where he was walking out into the

²⁵Lonesome Traveler (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 180-181.

desert "for a night's sweet sleep in the red moon desert" and the following conversation ensued:

"Where you goin?"
 "Sleep."
 "Sleep where?"
 "On the sand."
 "Why?"
 "Got my sleeping bag."
 "Why?"
 "Studyin' the great outdoors."
 "Who are you? Let's see your identification."
 "I just spent a summer with the Forest Service."
 "Did you get paid?"
 "Yeah."
 "Then why don't you go to a hotel?"
 "I like it better outdoors and it's free."
 "Why?"
 "Because I'm studying hobo."
 "What's so good about that?"²⁶

As Kerouac says, "They wanted an explanation for my hobo-ing..." It's a scene familiar to anybody who has done much hitch-hiking and who has learned to keep one eye on the prospective ride coming down the road and the other on the alert for the highway patrol. Americans have a difficult time understanding a freedom unless it's packaged, certified, and stamped with the Good Housekeeping seal of approval.

Gradually, then, the myth began to deflate. The enthusiasm which Kerouac had for America when he first decided to go west and meet Cassady in Denver, there to begin his long search for the pearl, slowly diminished and the bright dawn turned into a gray afternoon. The fantasy of love and beauty in a land flowing with milk and honey dissolved into the reality of "the dreadful stretches between

²⁶Kerouac, Lonesome Traveler, p. 181.

equally dreadful cities all of them looking the same when seen from the bus of woes, the inescapable bus of never-get-there stopping everywhere..."²⁷ The gayety of the Kerouac who exclaimed, upon first arriving in Des Moines, "...the prettiest girls in the world live in Des Moines" exhausted itself after an alcoholic breakdown in 1961, poignantly described in Big Sur, into the Kerouac who proclaimed, "It's all over...A peaceful sorrow at home is the best I'll ever be able to offer the world..."²⁸

The wild West was gone. There was no more open ranges. There was only the end of the land. Carole Gottlieb Vopat remarks in the Midwest Quarterly that:

On the Road ends with an elegy for a lost America, for the country which once might have been the father of us all, but now is only 'The land where they let children cry.' Dean Moriarty is himself America, or rather the dream of America, once innocent, young, full of promise and holiness, bursting with potential and vitality, now driven mad, crippled, impotent ("We're all losing our fingers"), ragged, dirty, lost, searching for a past of security and love that never existed, trailing frenzy and broken promises, unable to speak to anybody anymore.²⁹

If Dean Moriarty represented the dream of innocent, holy America, old Dean Moriarty, his father, represented the truth or the reality of the past. Kerouac was deeply involved with

²⁷ Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p. 346.

²⁸ Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p. 372.

²⁹ Carole Gottlieb Vopat, "Jack Kerouac's On the Road: A Re-evaluation," Midwest Quarterly, July 1973, p. 407.

the dream of America but the dream never materialized. He thinks of Dean Moriarty when the sun goes down in America, he thinks of the dream, but he also thinks of "Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found," the myth of the frontier.

Kerouac, in the final pages of Visions of Cody, spoke for all four authors in saying goodbye not only to Neal Cassady but to an era that worked so hard at finding and possessing some redeemable quality in the American heritage, that tried to reunite the dangerous separation growing between man and his mental and physical environment. "Adios," he says, "you who watched the sun go down, at the rail, by my side, smiling--" The image projects a scene of these subterranean writers standing arm in arm watching their dreams sink down and away from America. Burroughs, Patchen, Kerouac, and Miller, along with other notables such as Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso, tried to spark some life and creativity into this country. The result was a sad farewell. "A farewell," Allen Ginsberg acknowledges, "to all the promises of America, and explanation & prayer for innocence, a tearful renunciation of victory & accomplishment, a humility in the face of 'The necessary blankness of men' in hopeless America, hopeless World, in hopeless wheel of Heaven, a compassionate farewell to Love & the Companion, Adios King."³⁰ A goodbye to the legend of America that

³⁰ Allen Ginsberg, "The Great Rememberer," Saturday Review, 2 Dec. 1972, p. 63.

spoke of the perfection of the individual and a freedom as wild and untamed as the Old West.

Chapter 5

LITERARY AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Because Miller, Kerouac, Burroughs, and Patchen, along with many other subterranean writers and poets, were intent upon breaking away from the conformity and restrictions of America's social structure and were living the life-styles they described in their prose, they became minor folk heroes for the dissatisfied youth of the 50's and 60's. Henry Miller served as spokesman for two generations of counter cultures, and his work steadily grew in popularity through the years. In the fifties, he was the granddaddy hobo to be respected and revered. He demonstrated the possibility of countering the existing bureaucracy and succeeding in individual integrity alone. He looked into the face of the void and came away smiling. As Norman Mailer states, Miller "bounces in the stink."¹ Miller drew closer and closer to the beyond; he was bent upon approaching the outermost edge of consciousness where one was forced to look into the unknown and either cut all ties and jump or back away into a known security.

After his fashion, Miller was an example of a human who was totally alive, totally vibrating with the cosmos. And it was this quality, I think, which connected him with

¹"Henry Miller," American Review #24, p. 6.

the following generations. He was the pattern for Kerouac's band of hipsters who, as Kerouac admits, "kept talking about the things I liked, long outlines of personal experience and vision, night-long confessions full of hope that had become illicit and repressed by War, stirrings, rumblings of a new soul (that same old human soul)..."²

Maxwell Geismar states that:

From Miller descended...the beatnik and hippie traditions which, whatever their obvious limitations, provided a liberating force in our literature from the sterile conformity of the Fifties. Such writers as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, to mention only a few, brought our literature out of the bowers of academe back to the streets of life, a life distorted and malformed and 'sick' with the modern sickness which the early existentialists first proclaimed.³

These literary outlaws were dedicated to uplifting American literature. They saw that nothing new was being done and so they set out to bring new life to an art which should be responsible for making a painting of words come to life. Patchen and Burroughs, especially, opened the doors to experimental fiction. In Patchen's work there was a reunion of poetry and painting, two traditionally related art forms. "In this age of increasing technological specialization, art and poetry have sacrificed often a sense of universal

²Lester Bangs, "Elegy for a Desolation Angel," Rolling Stone, 29 Nov. 1969, p. 36.

³Maxwell Geismar, "The Shifting Illusion: Dream and Fact," American Dreams, American Nightmares, ed. David Madden (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 56.

subject matter to an exploration of new techniques...What was lost was a complex relationship between man and society, man and nature," states James Schevill in the American Poetry Review. "In Kenneth Patchen's paintings, the poetry is in the restoration of these relationships."⁴ Patchen refused to be restricted in his search for connections and in his expression of the unity in the midst of such diverse art forms.

From Patchen's and Burroughs' experimental integrity came the freedom to try new techniques. Fiction was liberated and writers were encouraged to discover a style personally suited to them. Seymour Krim, in describing Kerouac's influence as a writer, suggests that "Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, Le Roi Jones, folksinger-poet Bob Dylan, Hubert Selby, John Rechy, even Mailer, Krim, John Clellon Holmes, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, are only some of his opposite numbers who have learned to get closer to their own rendering of experience specifically because of Kerouac's freedom of language, 'punctuation'...and, in the fullest sense, his literary imagination."⁵ All of these subterranean writers were intent upon breaking literary boundaries in order to discover new modes of expression.

⁴James Schevill, "Kenneth Patchen: The Search for Wonder and Joy," American Poetry Review, 5, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1976), 32.

⁵Introduction to Desolation Angels, p. 16.

The author who created the most notable outrage on both the literary world and the social environment was Jack Kerouac. His Road novels fostered the emergence of the Beat Generation, a generation whose definition became as amorphous as the individuals involved. To some, the Beat Generation got its name from the Beatitudes of the Bible, to others, from the 'beat' of jazz, but in his own words, Kerouac claims, "It's a sort of furtiveness...like we were a generation of furtives. You know, with an inner knowledge there's no use flaunting on that level, the level of the 'public', a kind of beatness--I mean right down to it, to ourselves, because we all really know where we are--and a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world...It's something like that. So I guess you might say we're a beat generation."⁶

The Beat Generation meant many things to different critics and social-behavioralists who tried to pigeon-hole the movement just as they tried unsuccessfully to label the counter-culture of the Sixties which had so broad a base that it defied definitions. Ralph Gleason perhaps hit a key note in captureing the spirit of the Beat Generation by equating it with jazz. To be 'beat' is to be down and out but in Kerouac's writings, as in jazz, there is always that element of hope, regardless of the circumstances. Gleason states:

⁶Cook, p. 6.

Even though Kerouac himself--and many of his admirers--speaks of 'the beat generation' this is not true. To be beat means to be 'beat to the socks', down and out, discouraged and without hope. And not once in On the Road, no matter how sordid the situation nor how miserable the people, is there no hope....And unlike a member of a generation that is really beat, Kerouac leaves you with no feeling of despair but rather of exaltation.⁷

Kerouac became the "King of the Beats" because he symbolized some "unifying Principle by virtue of a unique combination of elements."⁸ He was the resourceful and independent man with a youthful exuberance; he was the Christian-mystic-Buddhist; he appreciated Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and ice cream; and he was the apolitical American smalltownner who meditated on the universe. The Beats, like Kerouac, Miller, Burroughs, and Patchen, would settle for nothing less than the whole soul. They went after their concept of the Holy Grail with an enthusiasm which represented the "apotheosis of American individuality and rascally exuberance..."⁹ They believed life should be lived to the hilt, enjoying every second that sped past, and they pushed their experience to the limit hoping for the ultimate high. This creed carried over into the early days of the Sixties and the Merry Pranksters of the Hip culture. "Rejecting T. S. Eliot, a poet of endings, for Walt Whitman,

⁷Gleason, p. 75.

⁸Krim, Shake It For the World, Smartass, p. 194.

⁹Bangs, p. 36.

a poet of beginnings, and bland Dwight D. Eisenhower for Clown Fool Harpo Marx," Rolling Stone magazine comments in a review of Scattered Poems, "Kerouac and the Beats opted for an America of back to town junk rather than Plastic Suburbia."¹⁰

The Beats turned their backs on the so-called technological progress which was creating bombs large enough to destroy the entire planet and corporations efficient enough to destroy the identity of the individual. According to John Clellon Holmes, another writer of the ~~Beat~~^c era, "the Beats returned 'to an older more personal, but no less rigorous code of ethics, which includes the inviolability of comradeship, the respect for confidence, and an almost mystical regard for courage--all of which are the ethics of the tribe, rather than the community.'"¹¹ A decade after the Beats had been transformed into the do-nothing beatniks of television's Maynard G. Krebs fame, this ethic re-emerged in the companionship and communes of the San Francisco flower children and the rollicking exploits of Ken Kesey and the Merry Band of Pranksters, the subject of Tom Wolfe's book, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. And who was in the vanguard of this new breed of social dissidents? None other

¹⁰ Book review of Scattered Poems by Jack Kerouac, Rolling Stone, 14 Oct. 1971, p. 58.

¹¹ John Hart, "Future Hero in Paradise: Kerouac's The Dharma Bums," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, XIV, No. 3 (1973), 61-62.

than Neal Cassady, the prototype for the heroes of Kerouac's Road novels.

Kerouac had written about his "jittery, neurotic, drug-taking, auto-racing, poetry-chanting, bop-digging, zen-squatting crew" over a decade before the youth of America discovered his world en masse.¹² Kerouac's energy was drained by the time the public became aware of the underground movement of Beat writers and before the literary world took notice of his talents, or the talents of the other subterranean writers. The Beat Generation descended upon Kerouac who was ill prepared to accept it after such a long interim between experience and recognition. He saw the first hipsters transformed into the later zombie-like "cool" stance "all hunching around in marijuana smoke, talking, the cool girls with long thin legs in slacks, the men with goatees, all an enormous drag after all and at the time (1957) not even started yet officially with the name of 'Beat Generation'."¹³ He was becoming an older man who drank too much and who cared more for answers than idols. In a few years he would suffer delirium tremens in *Big Sur* and have visions of how little his life meant to him anymore. "The road had come full circle," Ann Charters mentions in her biography of Kerouac, "Kerouac's bleak vision of himself

¹²Introduction to Desolation Angels, p. 13.

¹³Kerouac, Desolation Angels, p. 328.

turned back to his last sight of Cassady at the end of On the Road, beaten and defeated, drifting from one end of the country to the other with no real attachment to life or to love, the end of the dream of life as an adventure with nothing but good times ahead."¹⁴

The element of time took its toll on all of these writers. By the early Sixties, Miller's robust youth was slipping into a more sedentary, contemplative period, and his life-style was becoming more of a memory to the new generation of writers. He was no longer in the forefront of experimental prose. Patchen's health began to fail after a back operation which left him a virtual shut-in, appearing only briefly during this time for one or two poetry readings in the decade before his death in the early Seventies. Burroughs remains an expatriate, writing and publishing more and more infrequently, his material less and less shocking, and his influence becoming minimal. And Kerouac, beset by the "senseless emptiness" of his life, discarded his past along the road early in the Sixties, left the "raggedy madness" of his subterranean world, and tried to settle for a peaceful existence as a "man of contemplations." He died alone, misunderstood, and neglected in 1969, a year after Neal Cassady had died in Mexico.

Writers such as Kerouac, Burroughs, Patchen, and

¹⁴Charters, Kerouac, p. 332.

Miller attempted to instigate a revival of spiritual values in a society where such values had been lost. Allen Ginsberg emphasized this point in a letter to his father, and mentioned that "Whitman long ago complained that unless the material power of America were leavened by some kind of spiritual infusion we would wind up among the 'fabled damned.'"¹⁵ On the one hand, America was striving to rebuild a stability after a long and arduous war. On the other, these writers were insisting that the flexibility needed to adopt creative, progressive innovations should not be sacrificed for the sake of material gain. In the subterranean literary world these writers were engaged in a battle to uplift the stagnating trend of American literature. Their goals were similar. They sought a reunion of the spiritual with the material, of man with nature, and to this end they constructed their individual styles and thematic patterns.

¹⁵Ann Charters, Scenes Along the Road (New York: Gotham Book Mart and Gallery, Inc., 1970), n.p.

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